# THE MEUSE-ARGONNE OFFENSIVE 1918

## The American Expeditionary Forces' Crowning Victory

**BRIAN LANE HERDER**

ILLUSTRATED BY JOHNNY SHUMATE

CAMPAIGN 357

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*Series editor Nikolai Bogdanovic*

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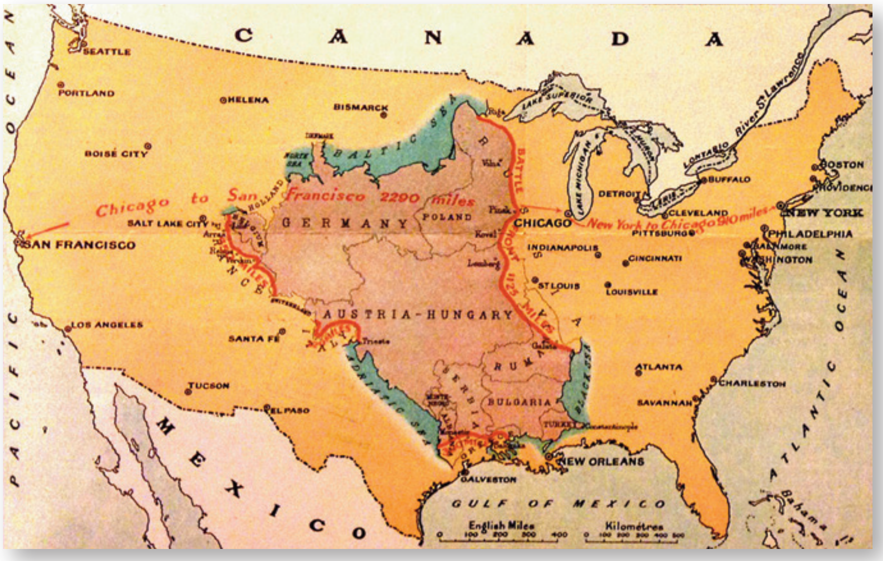
# ORIGINS OF THE CAMPAIGN

## AMERICA ENTERS THE GREAT WAR, 1917–18

By late 1916, World War I had raged indecisively for over two years. Unknown to the Allies, the German supreme command, the Oberste Heeresleitung (OHL), feared Germany had become increasingly trapped in a long, losing war of attrition, and its leaders grew increasingly desperate. Months earlier, a German study by Richard Fuss had claimed that if the Kaiserliche Marine (Imperial German Navy) could sink 600,000 tons of Allied shipping per month, Germany would force Britain to sue for peace in six months. Directly referencing the Fuss study, on December 22, 1916, Admiral Henning von Holtzendorff submitted a memorandum urging Germany's resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare. This was certain to draw the neutral United States in against Germany, but Holtzendorff and the OHL were confident they could win the war before the "disorganized and undisciplined" United States could decisively intervene. Holtzendorff himself promised Kaiser Wilhelm II, "I give your Majesty my word as an officer, that not one American will land on the Continent." A more prosaic Generalfeldmarschall Paul von Hindenburg opined simply that, "The war must be brought to an end by whatever means as soon as possible."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PHILADELPHIA
BALTIMORE
WASHINGTON
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New York to Chicago 910 miles
SALT LAKE CITY
SAN FRANCISCO
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SANTA FE
Trieste
RUMANIA
ATLANTA
CHARLESTON
SAVANNAH
TUCSON
EL PASO
SERBIA
BULGARIA
TURKEY
BLACK SEA
ADRIATIC SEA
NEW ORLEANS
GALVESTON
GULF OF MEXICO
MEXICO
PACIFIC OCEAN
ATLANTIC OCEAN
English Miles
Kilomètres
Bahama Is.

A period map of the Central Powers superimposed on the United States helps explain Allied enthusiasm and German trepidation at drawing the Americans into the European war. The United States' population was 50 percent larger than Germany's, while American manufacturing and agriculture were the richest on Earth. (Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division)

On January 31, 1917, the Kaiser duly authorized the resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare, to be effective the following day, February 1. U-boats would sink 497,095 tons of shipping in February 1917, followed by 553,189 tons in March, before notching up a staggering 867,834 tons in April. Topping all German outrages was the intercepted Zimmerman Telegram, which in January 1917 had tactlessly offered the Mexican government the US states of Texas, Arizona, and New Mexico if Mexico went to war with the United States.

On April 6, 1917, the United States declared war on the German Empire. "The world," President Woodrow Wilson announced, "must be made safe for democracy." The US government airily described itself not as an "Ally" but as an "Associated Power." Instead of the limited naval/economic war many Americans had assumed, Wilson chose to wage total war. A huge national army would be built and transported to France to fight the Deutsches Heer (German Army) on Germany's own terms. Wilson's notional France-bound army, the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF), would be built largely from conscripts, facilitated by the May 18, 1917 Selective Service Act. To command the AEF, Wilson and US Secretary of War Newton D. Baker appointed a no-nonsense, ramrod-straight cavalry officer, the iron-willed Major-General John J. Pershing. Pershing's AEF would be the fourth major Allied national army on the Western Front, joining Général de Division Philipe Pétain's Armée Française (French Army), Field Marshal Douglas Haig's British Expeditionary Force (BEF), and King Albert I's Armée Belge (Belgian Army).

Arriving at Boulogne-sur-Mer from the United States, a typically no-nonsense General Pershing storms down SS *Baltic*'s gangplank and into France, June 13, 1917. Accompanying Pershing were 107 US Army personnel and 83 civilian officials. While the French reception of the first AEF troops was particularly rapturous, Pershing knew he had a long, hard war ahead of him. (Bettmann/Getty Images)

The AEF inevitably reflected the strengths and weaknesses of contemporary American society. The United States' 100 million citizens were divided 50/50 between rural and urban and 85/15 between native-born and foreign-born; nearly 3 million were native German speakers. Overall, 1917 American society was young, healthy, affluent, and well educated. The United States additionally boasted the world's largest economy and third-largest navy. The peacetime US Army, however, comprised just 128,000 regulars and 81,000 reservists, and stood no formation larger than a regiment. The United States was further saddled with a decrepit national merchant fleet of just 2.4 million transoceanic tonnage (Britain's was 16 million). Additionally, American industrial mobilization would prove almost criminally inchoate; in stark contrast to the next war, the United States' massive economy would prove unable to supply even its own weapons, let alone that of its allies.

The first 14,000 US troops began arriving at St-Nazaire, France on June 26, 1917—this was the vanguard of the hastily assembled US 1st Division. The French and British governments immediately demanded "amalgamation"—the piecemeal integration of US troops (inexplicably nicknamed "doughboys") into their own armies as replacements. However, the Wilson administration had issued Pershing strict orders to maintain the AEF's political and military independence at all costs—a directive of which the fiercely stubborn and patriotic Pershing hardly needed convincing.

Pershing insisted the AEF control its own Western Front zone, eventually settling on the Lorraine region. On September 1, 1917, Pershing ordered

**OPPOSITE**

1. September 26, 0525hrs: Gouraud's French 4e Armée, with French 5e Armée to its left, opens the GAC offensive and Foch's overall Grand Offensive by driving north into German-held Champagne toward Mézières.
2. September 26, 0530hrs: Pershing's First US Army, as the right wing of the GAC, opens its offensive against Sedan by driving north between the Meuse River and the Argonne Forest.
3. September 27: Haig's BEF begins its drive across the Schelde Canal toward Cambrai.
4. September 28: King Albert's GAF opens its offensive toward Roulers/Courtrai.
5. September 29: Rawlinson's British Fourth Army, supported by Debeney's French 1er Armée, drives into the Hindenburg Line around St-Quentin.
6. September–November: Castelnau's GAE prepares for the future German Lorraine offensive.
7. October 12: Pershing establishes Second US Army under Bullard.
8. November 7: Now commanded by Liggett, US First Army reorients from attacking Sedan in the north to attacking east toward German Lorraine.
9. November 10: Ordered by Foch, Bullard's Second US Army opens its offensive into German Lorraine four days early.
10. November 11, 0600hrs: German delegation signs the Compiègne Armistice, becoming effective at 1100hrs.
11. November 11: Compiègne Armistice suspends Castelnau's scheduled November 14 GAE offensive into German Lorraine, which was to be supported on the left by Pershing's First and Second US armies.
12. December 8, 1918: The American occupation force, Dickman's recently established Third US Army, arrives in Coblenz.

his AEF General Headquarters to Chaumont. AEF transatlantic convoys would debark primarily at Bordeaux, La Pallice, St-Nazaire, and Brest. From here, US troops would be transferred inland to training areas through newly established AEF logistic zones. The massive operation required American engineers to build brand-new French infrastructure, including 82 ship berths, nearly 1,000 miles of standard-gauge rail, and over 100,000 miles of telecommunications lines. AEF transportation through France would be augmented by 1,500 locomotives and 20,000 railroad cars shipped from the United States. By late 1917, Allied convoying and improved escort tactics had permanently thwarted the German U-boats; some 183,896 American troops would arrive safely in France by January 1, 1918.

The Americans were just in time. By December 1917, Russia was in the throes of revolution and collapsed, freeing significant German forces to redeploy westward. By March 1918, Germany would deploy 3.5 million troops in 194 divisions on the Western Front, a temporary 10 percent advantage over the Allies. Desperate to win the war before the AEF arrived in force, General Erich Ludendorff unleashed his audacious 1918 Spring Offensives—Germany's last strategic throw of the dice. The spring crisis inspired the Allies to finally name an overall commander-in-chief of all Allied armies, Généralissime Ferdinand Foch.

## FOCH PLANS THE ALLIES' GRAND OFFENSIVE, JULY–SEPTEMBER 1918

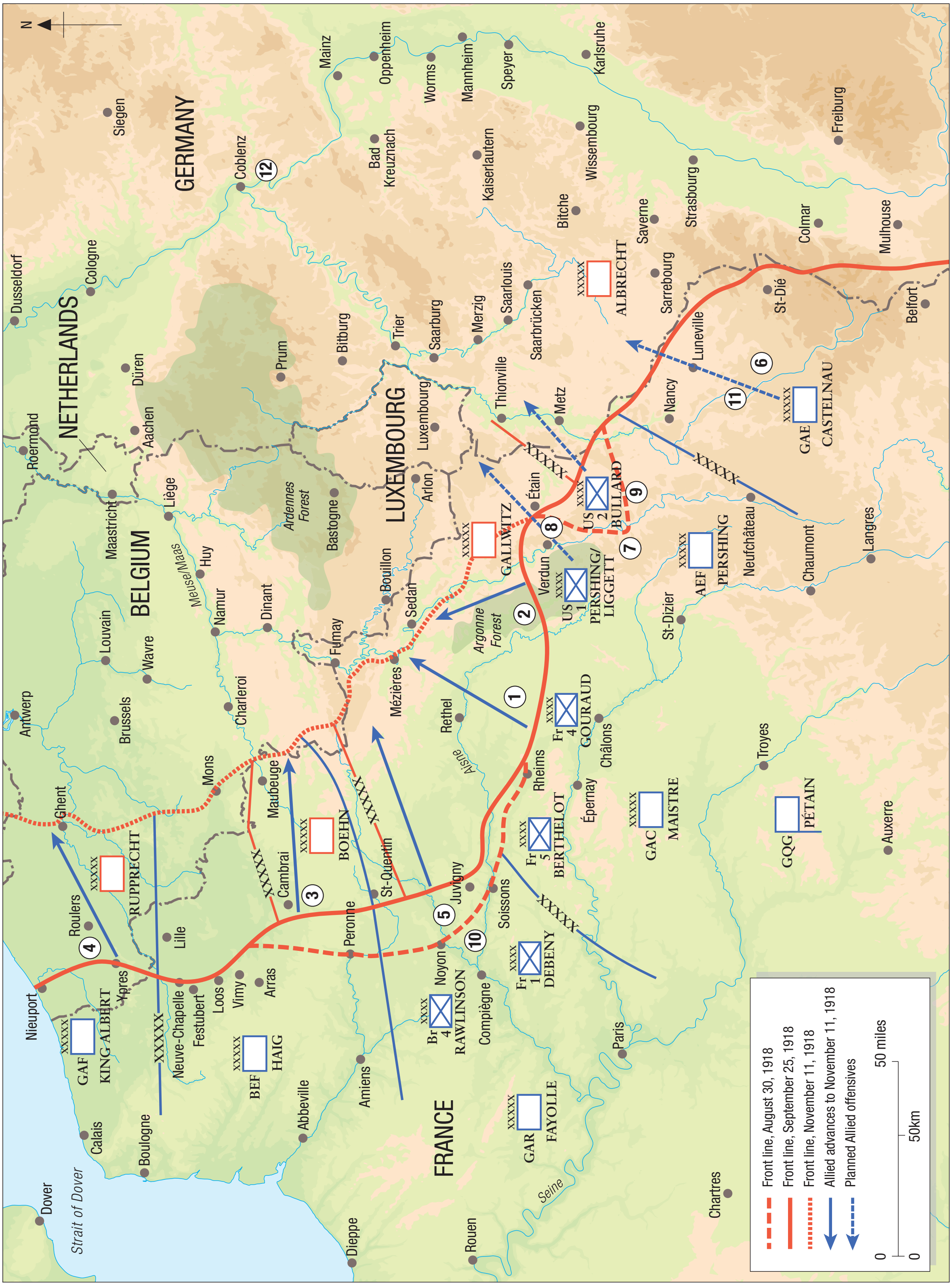
By midsummer 1918, Ludendorff's initially spectacular Spring Offensives had failed. Between March and late July, the Deutsches Heer had lost 977,555 irreplaceable men. Conversely, by June, the rapidly growing AEF had permanently tipped Western Front rifle strength in favor of the Allies. That same month, the US War Department authorized an enlarged 80-division AEF of 3.4 million troops. Germany had permanently squandered her temporary advantage, although by how much, few suspected.

Foch planned to seize vital German-occupied rail lines and raw materials in preparation for a war-winning 1919 offensive. The entire German front was supplied from Germany through a rail network divided by the mountainous Ardennes. The northern German armies were supplied by rail passing through Liège. South of the Ardennes, lines from Luxembourg, Thienville, and Metz converged at Sedan before extending to Mézières and then along the front; over this four-track line the Germans dispatched 250 freight trains a day to supply the Western Front.

On July 24, Foch convened a conference with Pétain, Haig, and Pershing at Foch's Château de Bombon headquarters. Rather than fight choreographed, set-piece battles, Foch would exploit increasing Allied numerical superiority by attacking all along the Western Front in a series of rolling offensives; these simultaneous, concentric attacks would pin outnumbered German forces and keep them from decisively reinforcing critically threatened sectors.

In Lorraine, Pershing finally established the independent First US Army on August 10, 1918. Immediately across the front, Pershing's future opponent, General Max von Gallwitz, confessed to his diary: "I never expected such speedy developments! The Americans are becoming dangerous!" There were now 29 (corps-sized) AEF divisions in France, but 14 were in the French

# Foch's Grand Offensive, September 26–November 11, 1918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Bad Kreuznach
Kaiserlautern
Wissembourg
Strasbourg
Freiburg
Colmar
Mulhouse
Belfort
Saverne
Sarrebourg
Bitche
St-Dié
Luneville
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Aachen
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Maastricht
Liege
Huy
Namur
Dinant
Meuse/Maas
Ardennes Forest
Bastogne
Arlon
Luxembourg
Thionville
Étain
Verdun
Bouillon
Sedan
Fumay
Mézières
Charleroi
Wavre
Louvain
Brussels
Antwerp
Ghent
Mons
Maubeuge
Cambrai
St-Quentin
Roulers
Lille
Ypres
Nieuport
Neuve-Chapelle
Festubert
Loos
Vimy
Arras
Peronne
Juvigny
Noyon
Soissons
Compiègne
Rethel
Aisne
Argonne Forest
Rheims
Épernay
Châlons
St-Dizier
Neufchâteau
Chaumont
Langres
Troyes
Auxerre
Paris
Seine
Chartres
Rouen
Dieppe
Amiens
Abbeville
Boulogne
Calais
Dover
Strait of Dover
XXXXX GAF KING ALBERT
XXXXX BEF HAIG
XXXX Br 4 RAWLINSON
XXXXX GAR FAYOLLE
XXXX Fr 1 DEBENY
XXXX Fr 5 BERTHELOT
XXXXX GAC MAISTRE
GQG PÉTAIN
XXXX Fr 4 GOURAUD
XXXX US 1 PERSHING/LIGGETT
XXXX US 2 BULLARD
XXXXX AEF PERSHING
XXXXX GAE CASTELNAU
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Front line, August 30, 1918
Front line, September 25, 1918
Front line, November 11, 1918
Allied advances to November 11, 1918
Planned Allied offensives
0 50 miles
0 50km

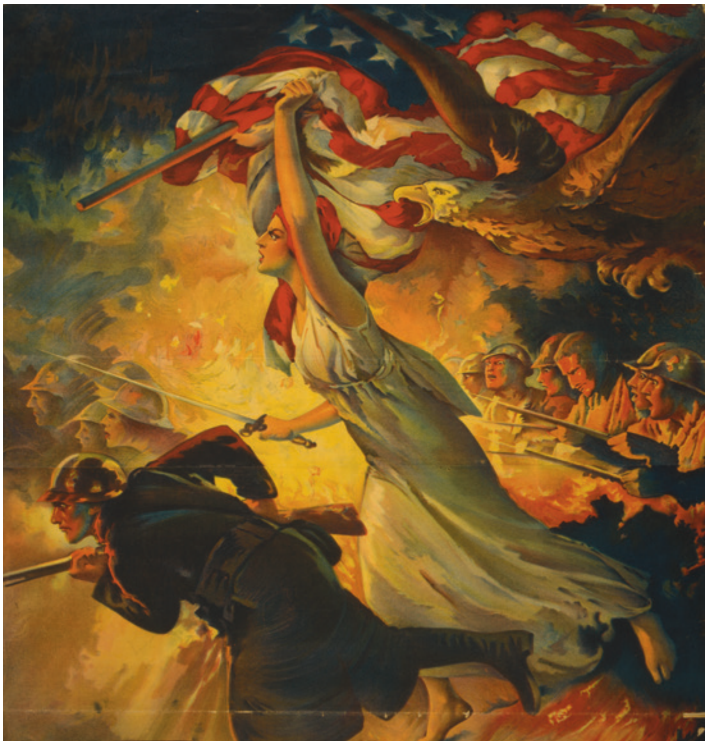
zone, five with the BEF, and the remaining ten still organizing. Nine AEF divisions had already seen emergency combat fighting Ludendorff's Spring Offensives and had taken 50,000 casualties. Foch ultimately expected the AEF to occupy one-third of the Western Front, about 94 miles. The AEF already had overtaken the BEF in total frontage manned, although the BEF had just scored a crushing victory at Amiens while First US Army was still marshalling for battle. Pershing assumed command of the extreme right wing of Foch's offensive, and prepared to attack through the St-Mihiel salient toward Metz.

By August 30, Foch believed the war could be won in 1918. After re-evaluating strategy, Foch suddenly made a new proposal to Pershing: the St-Mihiel operation would be canceled and the AEF subordinated under two different French commands attacking Mézières–Sedan. A livid Pershing refused. "Do you wish to take part in the battle?" Foch asked. "Most assuredly," Pershing responded, "but as an American Army." Foch brushed him off: "I must insist on the arrangement." Both men leapt from their chairs, Pershing later confessing to nearly striking Foch. "Marshal Foch," Pershing declared, "you may insist all you please, but I decline absolutely to agree to your plan. While our army will fight wherever you may decide, it will not fight except as an independent army." Ultimately, both men compromised. Pershing's St-Mihiel operation would proceed, but merely pinch off the salient. American forces would then transfer northwest to the Meuse-Argonne region for Foch's main offensive: the drive on Mézières–Sedan.

From left to right (northwest to southeast), the arrangement of Allied army groups on the Western Front would be:

**Groupe d'Armées des Flandres (GAF) (King Albert I)**
Belgian Armée (Albert I)
British Second Army (Plumer)
French VII Corps (Massenet)
French II Corps de Cavalerie (Robillot)
**British Expeditionary Force (BEF) (Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig)**
British First Army (Horne)
British Third Army (Byng)
British Fourth Army (Rawlinson)
**Groupe d'Armées de Réserve (GAR) (Général Émile Fayolle)**
French 1er Armée (Debeney)
French 10e Armée (Mangin)
**Groupe d'Armées du Centre (GAC) (Général Paul Maistre)**
French 5e Armée (Berthelot)
French 4e Armée (Gouraud)
First US Army (Pershing)
**Groupe d'Armées de l'Est (GAE) (Général Édouard de Castelnau)**
French 2e Armée (Hirschauer)
French 8e Armée (Gérard)
French 7e Armée (Boissoudy)

Foch's groups totaled 171 Allied divisions and about 1.75 million front-line troops. Facing them across the Western Front were 125 battered and depleted German divisions in five *Heeresgruppen* (army groups), or about 1.25 million Germans. With the Americans' role established, the plan for Foch's Grand Offensive was set:



Columbia, the feminine personification of the United States, rousingly leads American boys into battle in this 1918 Edwin Howland Blashfield Liberty Bonds poster. Both World War I and the national draft were decidedly unpopular in America. Wilson's government responded with an overbearing propaganda program so ham-handed it badly damaged Americans' opinion of their own government and even the mythical Columbia. (Library of Congress)

1. On September 26, 1918, Général Paul Maistre's GAC, including Pershing's First US Army, would drive north-northeast, converging against the Germans' strategically vital railheads at Mézières and Sedan. Foch intended the GAC to have the Grand Offensive's lead strategic role. Once the Franco-Americans captured the Mézières–Sedan railheads, the already shaky German position in France would collapse.
2. On September 27, the BEF under Field Marshal Douglas Haig would cross the Schelde Canal and advance toward Cambrai.
3. On September 28, King Albert's GAF would attack toward Roulers/Courtrai.
4. On September 29, General Sir Henry Rawlinson's British Fourth Army would drive directly into the Hindenburg Line at St-Quentin, with the GAR's French 1er Armée in support.
5. Général Édouard de Castelnau's GAE front would remain quiet while preparing for a future Lorraine offensive east of Metz.

With St-Mihiel the AEF's first campaign as an independent American army, Pershing stacked the deck as much as possible. Under Pershing were 550,000 American and 110,000 French troops arrayed against a mere 55,000 already evacuating Germans. First US Army slammed into the St-Mihiel salient between September 12 and 14, capturing 16,000 prisoners, 443 artillery pieces, and 752 machine guns, while suffering 8,182 US casualties (1,799 killed). First US Army's debut proved an overwhelming, if highly misleading, victory. Having already committed to Foch's September 26 offensive, Pershing was forced to stop short of Metz, a strategic railhead which some AEF officers believed lay almost defenseless—a glittering opportunity, perhaps, to win the war in a stroke.

Meanwhile, the summer's mysterious influenza epidemic continued undermining American strength. AEF hospitals admitted over 40,000 flu-ridden doughboys in September 1918, of whom 2,500 died. These figures far exceeded St-Mihiel casualties. But for the fading Deutsches Heer—also increasingly wracked with Spanish influenza—the signs were even more ominous. Over 250,000 American troops were pouring into France each month, with no end in sight.

# CHRONOLOGY

## 1917

| | |
|---|---|
| **February 1** | Germany resumes unrestricted submarine warfare. |
| **April 6** | United States declares war on Germany. |
| **May 18** | US Congress passes Selective Service Act (national conscription). |
| **June 26** | First 14,000 US troops arrive in France (1st Division). |
| **September 1** | AEF General Headquarters established in Chaumont, Lorraine region. |
| **October 21** | US 1st Division enters the line in France. |
| **December 31** | Four US divisions deployed near Verdun (1st, 2nd, 26th, and 42nd). |

## 1918

| | |
|---|---|
| **January 1** | 183,896 US troops have arrived in France. |
| **March 21** | Ludendorff opens ultimately unsuccessful Spring Offensives. |
| **June 16** | Combined Allied rifle strength on Western Front surpasses German. |
| **July 24** | Foch outlines his grand strategy at Allied conference. |
| **August 10** | First US Army established. |
| **September 12–14** | First US Army mauls withdrawing German forces in St-Mihiel salient. |
| **September 13** | First US Army begins redeployment to Meuse-Argonne. |
| **September 26** | First US Army opens Meuse-Argonne offensive. |
| **September 27** | US 79th Division takes Montfaucon. |
| **September 30** | Pershing temporarily suspends offensive to reorganize. |
| **October 2–7** | US 77th Division's "Lost Battalion" episode in the Argonne Forest. |
| **October 4** | Pershing resumes Meuse-Argonne offensive after making adjustments. |
| **October 6** | German Argonnen Gruppe transferred from 3.Armee to 5.Armee, unifying German Meuse-Argonne forces under 5.Armee command. |
| **October 8** | French XVII Corps attacks Côtes de Meuse. |
| **October 12** | Pershing makes major adjustments to AEF command organization. Bullard assumes command of newly established Second US Army. |
| **October 14** | Pershing resumes offensive against Kriemhilde Stellung. The 32nd Division takes the Côte Dame Marie strongpoint. |
| **October 16** | Liggett assumes First US Army command. US 42nd Division takes the Côte de Châtillon. Pershing's operational goals for September 26 finally achieved. |
| **October 17–31** | First US Army consolidates gains along Kriemhilde Stellung in preparation for final decisive attack. |
| **November 1** | Liggett's reorganized First US Army opens final drive on Sedan, with new emphasis on firepower. US V Corps advances 5 miles through Barricourt Heights. |
| **November 1/2** | Gallwitz orders 5.Armee to evacuate from Freya Stellung and begin fighting withdrawal toward Germany. |
| **November 2–3** | US V Corps' 2nd Division advances 5 miles through German positions on consecutive nights. |
| **November 4** | US III Corps' 5th Division crosses Meuse south of Dun-sur-Meuse. |
| **November 6/7** | "Race to Sedan" as US 1st Division cuts across route of US I Corps. |
| **November 9** | French 40e Division enters Sedan. |
| **November 10** | US V Corps crosses Meuse. Bullard's Second US Army attacks German lines northeast of St-Mihiel. |
| **November 11** | Compiègne Armistice officially ends World War I and Meuse-Argonne offensive at 1100hrs. |

# OPPOSING COMMANDERS

## GERMAN

The German Empire's constitutional commander-in-chief was its emperor, **Kaiser Wilhelm II**. By 1918, however, Germany was practically ruled by an OHL duumvirate headquartered in the German-occupied town of Spa, Belgium. Although polar opposites in personality, the two men nevertheless got along famously. A robust 6ft 5in. with piercing blue eyes, the 71-year-old **Generalfeldmarschall Paul von Hindenburg** was the figurehead and nominal leader. Easy-going, competent, and emanating a calm, aristocratic Prussian grandeur, Hindenburg followed the standard Prussian leadership model: "The commander in the field should only lay down the broad lines, leaving the details to his subordinates."

Hindenburg's nominal assistant was 53-year-old Erster Generalquartiermeister (deputy chief of staff) **General der Infanterie Erich Ludendorff**, who was widely understood to be the duo's operational expert and the real power behind Hindenburg's throne. Ludendorff was capable and ruthless, but also a high-strung workaholic who slept one hour a night. By mid-1918, Ludendorff increasingly approached psychological collapse, a condition facilitated by Germany's fading fortunes and the combat death of Ludendorff's beloved stepson.

By mid-1918, the Deutsches Heer was organized into five Western Front army groups (*Heeresgruppen*). Most of the Meuse-Argonne front fell under Heeresgruppe Gallwitz, which manned 75 miles of line, from Verdun west to the Argonne. The 66-year-old **General der Artillerie Max von Gallwitz** commanded Heeresgruppe Gallwitz, which was divided into 5.Armee, north and northeast of the Meuse-Argonne, and Armee Abteilung C, which extended southeast into the

The German Empire's wartime triumvirate inspects a map during mid-war. From left to right are Generalfeldmarschall Paul von Hindenburg, Kaiser Wilhelm II, and General der Infanterie Erich Ludendorff. Realistically, much of the German state existed to support the army—a legacy of Frederician Prussia. (Public domain)

St-Mihiel area. Gallwitz stands out as arguably the most competent mid-level German field general of World War I. By summer 1916, Gallwitz was transferred to 2.Armee command at the Somme, before being transferred back to the Verdun area in August 1916 as 5.Armee commander. Gallwitz's 5.Armee had already received the brunt of Pershing's St-Mihiel offensive in mid-September.

On September 25, 1918, **General der Kavallerie Georg von der Marwitz** assumed command of 5.Armee, which remained subordinated to Heeresgruppe Gallwitz. Marwitz's 5.Armee area was divided into corps-sized *Gruppen*. West of the Meuse was Maasgruppe West, and east of the Meuse was Maasgruppe Ost and the Austro-Hungarian-commanded Gruppe Ornes.

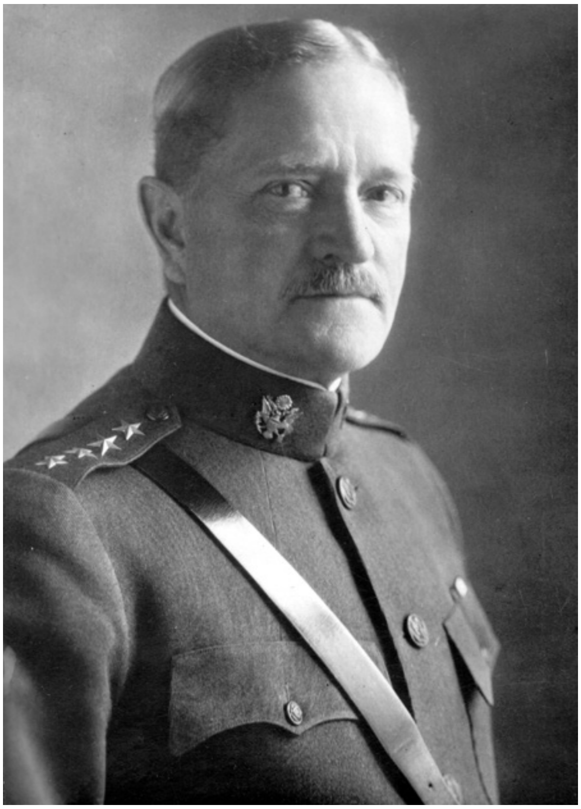
West of 5.Armee, **Generaloberst Karl von Einem**'s German 3.Armee straddled eastern Champagne and the western Meuse-Argonne. Within 3.Armee were four *Gruppen*, of which the eastern two *Gruppen* faced First US Army in the Meuse-Argonne: Generalleutnant Richard Wellman's Aisne Gruppe, and Generalleutnant Alfred von Kleist's Argonnen Gruppe. Von Einem answered not to Gallwitz, but to Heeresgruppe Kronprinz Wilhelm, a separate army group entirely.

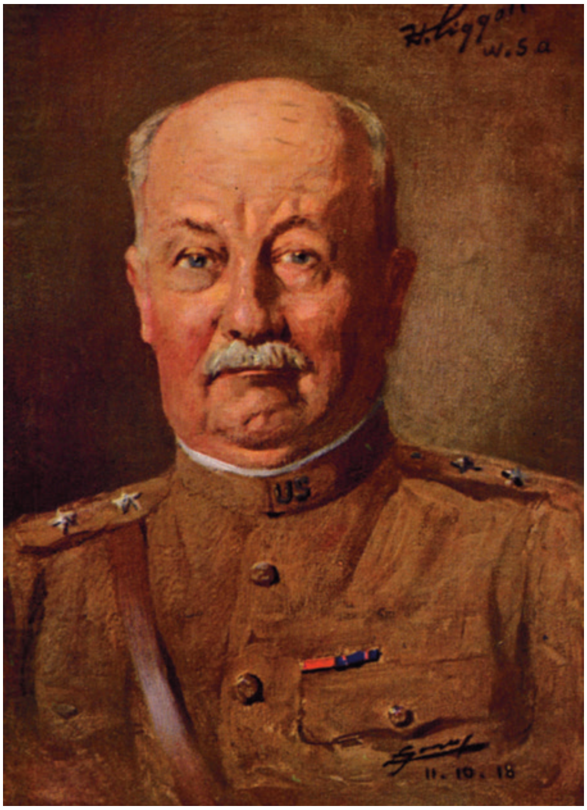
## ALLIED

Allied commander-in-chief (Commandant en Chef des Armées Alliées) **Généralissime Ferdinand Foch** was a consummate military professional and a relentless optimist who combined both high intellect and fierce aggressiveness. Unusually for a French general, the 67-year-old Foch was a devout student of Clausewitz, perhaps explaining his knack for divining German intentions. Foch was among the first Allied generals to grasp that Germany was on the verge of defeat in 1918; the Allies' final Grand Offensive was largely Foch's concept. Perhaps even more than his strategic intuition, Foch wielded a keen grasp of the political delicacy required in his role as multinational commander.

**General John J. "Black Jack" Pershing** commanded both First US Army and the entire AEF. After George Washington, Pershing received arguably the most difficult mission ever assigned to a single US military officer, and his civilian masters awarded Pershing near total authority in France to carry that mission out. A 58-year-old West Pointer and ex-Missouri schoolteacher, Pershing was supremely professional, publicly humorless, intensely stubborn, loyal, stern, fair, and morally beyond reproach. A strict disciplinarian, Pershing inspired the unquestioned respect if not love of his subordinates. Pershing proved a masterful organizer, administrator, and diplomat, although his tactical grasp of modern warfare remained dubious. Privately, Pershing was haunted by the shocking, tragic deaths of his wife and three young daughters in a 1915 Presidio house fire. Despite

General der Artillerie Max von Gallwitz seen in 1915. Like many successful wartime German generals, Gallwitz was shuffled around from appointment to appointment, and he held various high commands on both the Western and Eastern fronts. Gallwitz would retire from the Deutsches Heer in December 1918 and serve in the Reichstag between 1920 and 1924, before dying in Breslau in 1937. (Bulgarian Archives State Agency/Public Domain)





his conspicuous flaws, Pershing unquestionably ranks as one of the truly towering figures in American military history.

**Major-General Hunter Liggett** commanded US I Corps at the start of the Meuse-Argonne, before being promoted to lieutenant-general and First US Army commander on October 12, 1918. At 61 years old and over 300 lb, the unassuming Liggett hardly looked the soldier. However, the thoughtful and quietly confident Liggett understood modern warfare, was sensitive to his men's ordeal, and proved a superb planner. On the battlefield, Liggett was sharp and aggressive, possessing that rare *coup d'oeil* (glance of the eye) talent of history's great field captains. Although now virtually forgotten even in his own country, Liggett remains one of the finest generals the United States has ever produced.

**Major-General Robert E. Lee Bullard** opened the campaign commanding US III Corps, before being promoted to lieutenant-general and Second US Army command. Bullard was an aggressive, bombastic Alabaman who, as a child, successfully convinced his parents to rename him "Robert E. Lee" after the Confederate hero. Bullard despised even mildly complicated maneuvers, which he derided as "Leavenworthitis." A conspicuous glory-seeker, Bullard's career was marked by frequent brazen autonomy.

Immediately west of Pershing's First US Army, one-armed, battle-hardened **Général d'Armée Henri Gouraud** commanded the independent French 4e Armée in Champagne. Theoretically, French 4e Armée would coordinate with First US Army as they drove north together on either side of the Argonne Forest.

**ABOVE LEFT**
AEF commander-in-chief General John J. Pershing *c.* 1920, after he had been named General of the Armies with four gold stars. A German-American from rural northern Missouri, the young Pershing had been commended for cavalry actions against the Apache and Sioux during the final years of the Indian Wars. (Hulton Archive/ Getty Images)

**ABOVE RIGHT**
Former Army War College president Major-General Hunter Liggett calmed himself before battle by playing solitaire. Visibly overage and overweight, Liggett joked that, "There is such a thing not only as being too old to fight but too fat. That disqualification is the more serious if the fat is above the collar." Fortunately for his country, Liggett's was not. (Universal History Archive/ Getty Images)

# OPPOSING FORCES

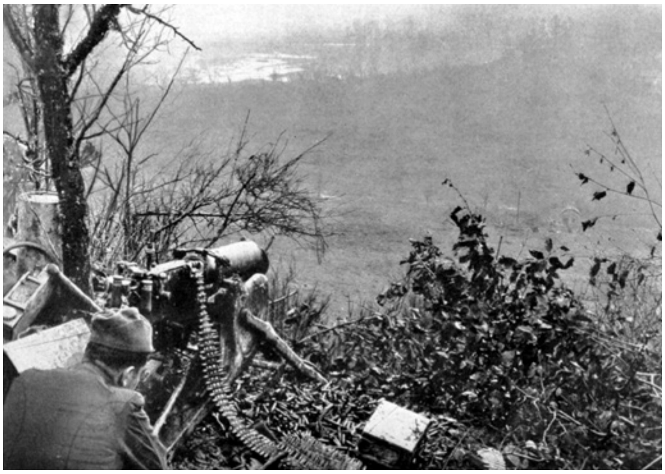
## GERMAN

### *German troops*

By the Meuse-Argonne, a German staff officer noted, "The German army had suffered terrible losses … The best men were already long lying under the Earth." Studying German prisoners on D-Day, an American doughboy observed, "Instead of the brutal, bestial murderers of babies and rapers of women we saw a crown of blond blue-eyed boys and studious looking elderly men with spectacles." These old men, boys, and replacements usually manned expendable front-line positions, with the hardened veterans in reserve. Realistically the average German division was about 9,000-strong, a third of fresh US divisions. On the morning of September 26, 1918, five German divisions (about 45,000 men) held the Meuse-Argonne line, with eight more divisions in immediate reserve.

Theoretically, a 1918 German infantry division was equipped with 216 light machine guns, 130 heavy machine guns, 76 mortars, 36 field guns, and 12 howitzers. Germans employed no tanks at the Meuse-Argonne, but German infantry wielded Mauser M1918 T-Gewehr antitank rifles, which easily penetrated the Americans' Renault light tanks.

The Prussian 1.Garde-Infanterie and 5.Garde-Infanterie divisions were theoretically among the Reich's elite formations, but they had been long ravaged by attrition. Infanterie, Reserve, and Landwehr divisions had respectively comprised first-, second-, and third-tier units, but by 1918, these notions were nominal. The kingdoms of Bayern (Bavaria), Württemberg, and Sachsen (Saxony) maintained their own armies and divisions within the greater Prussian-dominated Deutsches Heer; all were represented at the Meuse-Argonne.



An American doughboy inspects a captured German machine-gun position atop a ridge at Grandpré. The damage such well-placed German machine guns could do sweeping the Meuse-Argonne's defiles is obvious. This position was part of the Kriemhilde Stellung that extended into 3.Armee territory, known as the Brunhilde Stellung. (*American Armies and Battlefields in Europe*, 1938, public domain)

### *German defensive lines*

By late 1916, the Germans had begun building the Siegfried Stellung (Siegfried Position), a series of sophisticated fortified defensive lines across the

Western Front which the Allies collectively called "the Hindenburg Line." Along miles of no-man's-land, the Germans had repeatedly erected carpets of lavishly strung barbed-wire entanglements up to 30 yards deep; these fronted lightly held initial trench lines designed to slow attackers. Behind them, stronger defensive lines employing interlocking machine-gun nests would break attacks, often by using barbed-wire entanglements to canalize attacking infantry into cul-de-sac killing zones swept by multiple machine guns. Years of second-growth vegetation had now entwined itself within the existing barbed wire, thickening and concealing the entanglements; invisible strands even ran underwater through creeks and ravines. "It was probably the most comprehensive system of leisurely prepared defense known to history," claimed US Brigadier-General James G. Harbord. "Old, rusty, new, twisted, straight, netted, crossed, and overlapping barbed wire was strung in endless miles with fortified strong points, dugouts, concrete machine-gun emplacements, and many lines of trenches flanking and in parallel depth."

### *German doctrine*

By 1918, the Deutsches Heer emphasized artillery, poison gas, and machine guns. For example, when the German 123.Infanterie-Division was transferred to the Meuse-Argonne, it was down to 1,794 officers and men, but boasted 198 machine guns—one machine gun per every nine men. By 1918, some 90 percent of German small-arms rounds were expended by machine guns. The thousands of German machine guns defending the Meuse-Argonne were mostly the Mauser MG 08/15 light machine gun, a stripped-down version of the MG 08 heavy machine gun. An American major recalled having to "simply charge a gun from the front and both flanks, and take it regardless of our losses, which, per gun captured, averaged ten to twenty men."

Artillery inflicted 65–70 percent of all World War I casualties. In 1918, German artillery was still the world's best, dominating the Meuse-Argonne battlefield until November 1. A US infantryman grumbled, "Every goddamn German who didn't have a machine gun had a cannon." Primary German field guns and howitzers were the 7.7cm (77mm) Feldkanone 16, the 10.5cm (105mm) leichte Feldhaubitze 16, and the 15cm (150mm) schwere Feldhaubitze 13. German gunners had spent the preceding quiet years preregistering every inch of ground; when the US 35th Division established its headquarters in a recently captured farmhouse, German artillery responded by putting a 77mm shell through one of its windows.

German war materiel captured by the US 79th Division, viewed in October 1918. In the foreground, German howitzers have gotten mired in the deep Meuse-Argonne mud. In the background are a few automobiles, as well as an abandoned narrow-gauge *Feldbahn* train. (National Archives and Records Administration)

### *Luftstreitkräfte*

Fewer than 300 German planes deployed in the Meuse-Argonne, but they were skillfully and aggressively handled and included all three of Prussia's elite Jagdgeschwader fighter groups. A nominal 18 German fighters comprised a German fighter flight (Jagdstaffeln or Jasta), with four Jastas producing a Jagdgeschwader (72 fighters). Bomber flights (Bombenstaffeln) and reconnaissance flights (Fliegerabteilungen) comprised 12 and six planes each. Additionally, each German *Gruppe* deployed a detachment of four to six balloons for artillery observation. Compared to the Americans, German aircraft and balloons would provide superior artillery spotting and close air support, but lack of fuel and replacement pilots significantly hampered German air operations.

### Austro-Hungarian forces under Gallwitz

Heeresgruppe Gallwitz controlled three of the Western Front's four Austro-Hungarian (Kaiserlich und Königlich or KuK) divisions, plus Feldmarschalleutnant Ludwig Goiginger's independent XVIII. Korpskommando headquarters. Austrian rifle strength came to 18,000, with ethnic make-up largely Romanian, German, and Hungarian. German–Austrian military relations were complex and polite at best.

## ALLIED

"Dressed in their khaki uniforms," AEF Captain Ernest Peixotto recalled, "they looked strangely alike, emanating a powerful impression of ruddy, clean-shaven youth, of lithe, athletic bodies with strong clean limbs—the only really youthful army in the field in 1918."

By September 26, Pershing had deployed 600,000 US troops in the Meuse-Argonne region, with 252,000 on the front line in nine divisions. Six reserve divisions brought strength to 420,000 divisional troops, not including corps, army, and support personnel. Some 3,980 guns were spread throughout the entire First US Army, with 2,775 guns in the Meuse-Argonne. Almost all AEF heavy equipment was supplied by France or Britain.

### AEF troops

The AEF was commanded by West Point-trained professional officers, citizen-soldier officers of the state militias (National Guard), and 90-day Officer Candidate School graduates. Competent enlisted men were also promoted to junior officer ranks. The US Army's phenomenal 1917–18 expansion meant many West Point graduates had inevitably been promoted beyond their talent level. These Regular Army officers often scorned National Guard officers and men, whose skill and dedication they generally underestimated. Additionally, serving with Gouraud's French 4e Armée in Champagne were four regiments of the segregated US 92nd and 93rd divisions. These regiments comprised black troops and junior officers, but were commanded by white field officers.

The standard AEF small arm was the American-produced Enfield M1917 .30-06 rifle, adapted from the British P14. The AEF's regulation sidearm was the semiautomatic Colt .45 M1911. Lacking American-designed automatic rifles, the AEF fielded the despised French M1915 8mm Chauchat. The superb M1918 .30-06 Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR) was finally issued to some units especially for the Meuse-Argonne. The main AEF heavy machine gun was the French 8mm M1914 Hotchkiss, although the sublime watercooled Browning .30-caliber M1917 began reaching the AEF in the final months of the war.

### *AEF divisions*

US divisions were ostensibly Regular Army (professional), National Guard (state militias), or National Army (conscripted). By mid-1918, these respective identities had become so blurred that all three were abolished into a single United States Army. However, the old divisional rivalries and personal animosities remained.

American divisions were oversized "square" divisions organized around four infantry regiments in two infantry brigades, supported by a field artillery brigade. US 2nd Division uniquely comprised one US Army infantry brigade and one US Marine brigade. Each AEF division comprised 12 battalions of 1,027 men each, which were themselves built from huge 250-man companies. Divisional arms boasted 24 155mm Schneider/6in. howitzers, 50 M1897 75mm/M1902 3in. guns, 12 1-pdr (37mm) guns, 36 Stokes trench mortars, 17,666 rifles, 768 automatic rifles, 224 heavy machine guns, and 36 antiaircraft machine guns. At 28,059 men, 6,556 animals, 577 trucks, and 482 ambulances, cars, and motorcycles, AEF divisions resembled ersatz European corps, but required 30-plus miles of road space to march. Pershing expected his massive American formations to overcome offensive attrition as well as minimize the US Army's lack of experienced officers.

Lieutenant-Colonel George S. Patton poses in front of a Renault FT light tank in France, summer 1918. Already a masterful horseman, swordsman, and marksman, Patton quickly took to the new tank technology. He was easily the top tank expert in the AEF by 1918. (US Army Signal Corps, public domain)

### *AEF doctrine*

The AEF's categorically obsolete tactical doctrine derived from the US Army's 1911 *Infantry Drill Regulations* and 1914 *Field Service Regulations*. Pershing himself prized what he called "open warfare" tactics, which he claimed stressed ostensible American frontier strengths of self-reliance, movement, and rifle marksmanship (and even the bayonet) over machine guns and artillery, which Pershing considered supporting weapons. Although deeply suspicious of his officers, the AEF commander believed greatly in the American enlisted man, whom Pershing assumed morally superior to Europe's supposedly decadent soldier stock—his boys, after all, were descended from those Europeans brave enough to conquer the New World. Incidentally, Pershing's romantic convictions echoed the disastrously costly tactics and chauvinisms of 1914. "He thought he was spreading a new gospel of faith," British theorist Basil Liddell Hart observed, "when actually it was an old faith exploded."

US artillery skill was initially poor, due to inexperience and overly decentralized command. US officers were additionally slow to use poison gas. However, a major shake-up in American command and tactics would transform the battle on November 1, after which the much-improved American artillery would prove devastating.

German troops universally praised American soldiers' courage, physical vigor, and sheer numbers, but held their tactical skill in deep contempt. Modern machine-gun tactics such as indirect fire, reverse slopes, and "beaten zones" were scarcely known within the AEF, while American doctrine assaulting enemy machine-gun nests was almost nonexistent. According to historian David Kennedy, "The AEF had an immense numerical superiority over the Germans in the Meuse-Argonne, and made the most of its advances by simply smothering the enemy with flesh." Nevertheless, 47 days of brutal combat proved a harsh but effective schoolmaster; the battle-hardened AEF of November 11 would barely resemble that of September 26.

### *First US Army tanks*

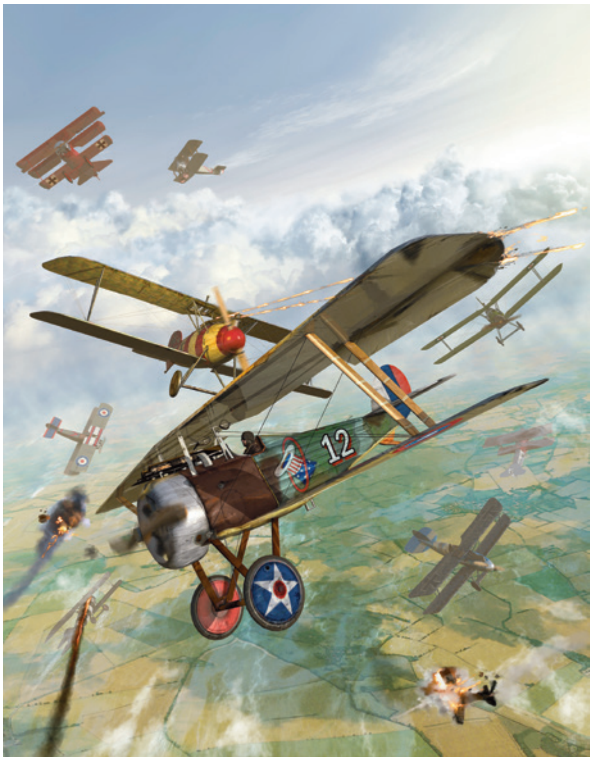
Pershing opened the Meuse-Argonne offensive with 419 French-built tanks, divided between the US 1st and 3rd Tank brigades. The most numerous was the 7.2-ton Renault FT-17 light tank. The two-man Renault was armed with either a 37mm gun or a Hotchkiss 8mm machine gun. Its cross-country speed was 1.5 mph. French tank units attached to First US Army also employed small numbers of 13.6-ton Schneider CA1 and 23-ton Saint-Chamond medium tanks.

### *First Army Air Service*

American airpower for the Meuse-Argonne tallied 821 airplanes (604 American, 217 French) and 15 balloons (13 American, two French). Each AEF squadron comprised 18 aircraft. The standard AEF fighter was the 131mph SPAD S.XIII, while the De Havilland DH.4, Bréguet 14A.2, and Salmson 2.A2 equipped bombardment squadrons. An AEF balloon company comprised one balloon and six observers, plus support personnel.

Pershing's First Army Air Service was commanded by the flamboyant and abrasive Colonel Billy Mitchell, a burgeoning strategic airpower zealot who "despised the ground he walked on." Mitchell would brush off air superiority, observation, and close air support in favor of largely unsuccessful interdiction missions behind German lines. Despite a 3:1 American advantage, German aircraft mostly raided at will over the largely undefended front. Mitchell's leadership of AEF air assets ultimately proved erratic and inattentive of practical needs on the ground.

A dogfight breaks out over France between the German and American air forces. American flyers were typically much less experienced and much more aggressive than their French counterparts. Meanwhile, the Americans typically faced extremely skilled and experienced German aces over German-occupied territory. Not surprisingly, September 1918 proved the costliest month of the war for Allied airmen. (Kurt Miller/Stocktrek Images/Getty Images)



### *French forces under Pershing*

French soldiers and airmen manned many of the heavy weapons belonging to nominal US units, such as heavy artillery, tanks, and airplanes; 250 French-crewed tanks comprised the entire US 3rd Tank Brigade. The French XVII Corps was absorbed into First US Army for the Meuse-Argonne, as was the French II Corps d'Armée Colonial. Within these two corps, four subordinated French divisions engaged the enemy: the 18e Division, the 26e Division, the 10e Division d'Infanterie Coloniale, and the 15e Division d'Infanterie Coloniale. The French 5e Division de Cavalerie was temporarily held in US I Corps reserve as a potential exploitation force, but ultimately saw no action.

# MEUSE-ARGONNE ORDERS OF BATTLE, SEPTEMBER 26, 1918

**Notes:**

* Corps reserve

** Army reserve

All corps and front-line divisions are generally listed in order from west to east.

## GERMAN

### 3.ARMEE (GENERALOBERST KARL VON EINEM) (HEERESGRUPPE KRONPRINZ WILHELM)

**I.Reserve-Korps (Aisne Gruppe) (Generalleutnant Richard Wellman)**

**9.Landwehr-Division (Generalmajor Hermann von Oppeln-Bronikowski)**

- 76.Landwehr-Infanterie-Brigade
  - Landwehr-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 83
  - Grossherzoglich Hessisches Landwehr-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 116
  - Grossherzoglich Hessisches Landwehr-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 118
- 1.Eskadron/Dragoner-Regiment von Bredow (1.Schlesisches) Nr. 4
- Artillerie-Kommandeur 150
  - Landwehr-Feldartillerie-Regiment Nr. 9
- Pionier-Bataillon Nr. 409

**76.Reserve-Division (Generalmajor Alfred Freiherr von Quadt-Hüchtenbruck)**

- 76.Reserve-Infanterie-Brigade
  - Reserve-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 252
  - Reserve-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 253
  - Reserve-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 254
  - Maschinengewehr-Scharfschützen-Abteilung Nr. 59
  - Reserve-Radfahrer-Abteilung Nr. 76
- 3.Eskadron/Reserve-Ulanen-Regiment Nr. 1
- Artillerie-Kommandeur 76
  - Reserve-Feldartillerie-Regiment Nr. 76
  - II.Bataillon/Fussartillerie-Regiment Nr. 24
- Pionier-Bataillon Nr. 376

**2.Landwehr-Division (K. Preuss. General der Artillerie z. D. A. Franke)**

- 54.Landwehr-Brigade
  - Württembergisches Landwehr-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 120
  - Württembergisches Landwehr-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 122
  - Württembergisches Landwehr-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 125
- 4.Eskadron/Ulanen-Regiment König Wilhelm I (2.Württembergisches) Nr. 20
- Artillerie-Kommandeur 148
  - Landwehr-Feldartillerie-Regiment Nr. 2
- Pionier-Bataillon Nr. 402

**53.Reserve-Division (Generalmajor Georg Frotscher)***

- 105.Reserve-Infanterie-Brigade
  - Königlich Sächsisches Reserve-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 241
  - Königlich Sächsisches Reserve-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 242
  - Königlich Sächsisches Reserve-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 243
- Königlich Sächsische Reserve-Kavallerie-Abteilung Nr. 53
- Königlich Sächsischer Artillerie-Kommandeur 155
  - Königlich Sächsisches Reserve-Feldartillerie-Regiment Nr. 32
  - IV.Bataillon/Königlich Sächsisches Reserve-Fussartillerie-Regiment Nr. 24
- Königlich Sächsisches Pionier-Bataillon Nr. 353

**Generalkommando 58 (Argonnen Gruppe) (Generalleutnant Alfred von Kleist)**

**1.Garde-Infanterie-Division (Generalmajor Eitel Friedrich von Preussen)**

- 1.Garde-Infanterie-Brigade
  - 1.Garde-Regiment zu Fuss
  - 2.Garde-Regiment zu Fuss
  - 4.Garde-Regiment zu Fuss
  - MG-Scharfschützen-Abteilung Nr. 8
- 3.Eskadron/Leib-Garde-Husaren-Regiment
- Garde-Artillerie-Kommandeur Nr. 1
  - 1.Garde-Feldartillerie-Regiment
  - I.Bataillon/Garde-Fussartillerie-Regiment
- Garde-Pionier-Bataillon

**5.Garde-Infanterie-Division (Generalmajor Walter von Haxthausen)***

- 2.Garde-Infanterie-Brigade
  - 3.Garde-Regiment zu Fuss
  - Garde-Grenadier-Regiment Nr. 3
  - Infanterie-Regiment Graf Tauentzien von Wittenberg (3.Brandenburgisches) Nr. 20
- 1.Eskadron/Garde-Ulanen-Regiment Nr. 2
- Garde-Artillerie-Kommandeur Nr. 5
  - Garde-Feldartillerie-Regiment Nr. 4
  - I.Bataillon/Garde-Reserve-Fussartillerie-Regiment Nr. 1
- Pionier-Bataillon Nr. 100

### 5.ARMEE (GENERAL DER KAVALLERIE GEORG VON DER MARWITZ) (HEERESGRUPPE GALLWITZ)

**XXI.Armee-Korps (Maasgruppe West) (General Ernst von Oven)**

**117.Infanterie-Division (Generalmajor Karl Höfer)**

- 233.Infanterie-Brigade
  - Reserve-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 11
  - Reserve-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 22
  - 4.Schlesisches Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 157
- 1.Eskadron/Kürassier-Regiment Graf Gessler (Rheinisches) Nr. 8
- Artillerie-Kommandeur 117
  - Feldartillerie-Regiment Nr. 233
  - Fussartillerie-Bataillon Nr. 88
- Pionier-Bataillon Nr. 117

**7.Reserve-Division (Generalmajor Wilhelm von Ribbentrop)**

- 14.Reserve-Infanterie-Brigade
  - Reserve-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 36
  - Reserve-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 66
  - Reserve-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 72
  - Maschinengewehr-Scharfschützen-Abteilung Nr. 71
- 1.Eskadron/Reserve-Reiter-Regiment Nr. 1
- Artillerie-Kommandeur 95
  - Reserve-Feldartillerie-Regiment Nr. 7
  - Fussartillerie-Bataillon Nr. 52
- Pionier-Bataillon Nr. 307

**5.Bayerische Reserve-Division (Generalmajor Hermann Ritter von Burkhardt)***

- 11.Bayerische Reserve-Infanterie-Brigade
  - Kgl. Bayerisches Reserve-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 7
  - Kgl. Bayerisches Reserve-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 10
  - Kgl. Bayerisches Reserve-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 12
- 2.Eskadron/Kgl. Bayerisches 3.Chevaulegers-Regiment Herzog Karl Theodor
- Kgl. Bayerischer Artillerie-Kommandeur 17
  - Kgl. Bayerisches Reserve-Feldartillerie-Regiment Nr. 5
  - II.Bataillon/Kgl. Sächs. Reserve-Fussartillerie-Regiment Nr. 19
  - Kgl. Bayerisches Fussartillerie-Bataillon Nr. 17
- Kgl. Bayerisches Pionier-Bataillon Nr. 18

**37.Infanterie-Division (Generalmajor Walther von Eberhardt)****

- 73.Infanterie-Brigade
  - 2.Masurisches Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 147
  - 1.Ermländisches Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 150
  - 2.Ermländisches Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 151
  - Maschinengewehr-Scharfschützen-Abteilung Nr. 57
- 3.Eskadron/Jäger-Regiment zu Pferde Nr. 10
- Artillerie-Kommandeur 37
  - 1.Masurisches Feld-Artillerie-Regiment Nr. 73
  - II.Bataillon/Lothringisches Fussartillerie-Regiment Nr. 16

- Pionier-Bataillon Nr. 134

**V.Reserve-Korps (Maasgruppe Ost) (General der Infanterie Freiherr Franz von Soden)**

**Kaiserlich und Königlich 1.Infanterie-Division (Feldmarschalleutnant Josef Metzger)**

- Infanterie-Brigade Nr. 2
  - Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 5
  - Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 61
- Infanterie-Brigade Nr. 2
  - Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 112
  - Feldjäger-Bataillon Nr. 17
  - Feldjäger-Bataillon Nr. 25
  - Feldjäger-Bataillon Nr. 31
- Feldartillerie-Brigade Nr. 1

**15.Infanterie-Division (Generalleutnant Gerhard Tappen)**

- 80.Infanterie-Brigade
  - 7.Rheinisches Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 69
  - 9.Rheinisches Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 160
  - Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 389
- 2.Eskadron/Husaren-Regiment König Wilhelm I (1.Rheinisches) Nr. 7
- Artillerie-Kommandeur 15
  - Bergisches Feldartillerie-Regiment Nr. 59
  - Fussartillerie-Bataillon Nr. 135
- Pionier-Bataillon Nr. 125

**Kaiserlich und Königlich XVIII.Korpskommando (Gruppe Ornes) (Feldmarschalleutnant Ludwig Goiginger)**

**33.Infanterie-Division (Generalmajor Walther von Schönberg)**

- 66.Infanterie-Brigade
  - Metzer Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 98
  - 1.Lothringisches Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 130
  - 3.Lothringisches Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 135
  - Maschinengewehr-Scharfschützen-Abteilung Nr. 43
- 4.Eskadron/Jäger-Regiment zu Pferde Nr. 12
- Artillerie-Kommandeur 33
  - Feldartillerie-Regiment Nr. 283
  - Fussartillerie-Bataillon Nr. 76
- 1.Lothringisches Pionier-Bataillon Nr. 16

**27.Division (2.Königlich Württembergische) (K. Preuss. Generalleutnant Graf von Pfeil und Klein-Ellguth)**

- 53.Infanterie-Brigade
  - Infanterie-Regiment Kaiser Wilhelm, König von Preussen (2.Württembergisches) Nr. 120
  - Grenadier-Regiment König Karl (5.Württembergisches) Nr. 123
  - Infanterie-Regiment König Wilhelm I (6.Württembergisches) Nr. 124
  - Maschinengewehr-Scharfschützen-Abteilung Nr. 53
- 5.Eskadron/Ulanen-Regiment König Karl (1.Württembergisches) Nr. 19
- Artillerie-Kommandeur 27
  - Feldartillerie-Regiment König Karl (1.Württembergisches) Nr. 13
  - II./Hohenzollernsches Fussartillerie-Regiment Nr. 13
- Pionier-Bataillon Nr. 13

**32.Infanterie-Division (Sächsische) (Generalmajor Maximilian von Scheel)**

- 5.Infanterie-Brigade Nr. 63 (63.Infanterie-Brigade)
  - 3.Infanterie-Regiment König Ludwig III von Bayern Nr. 102
  - 4.Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 103
  - 12.Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 177
- 4.Eskadron/3.Husaren-Regiment Nr. 20
- Artillerie-Kommandeur 32
  - 5.Feldartillerie-Regiment Nr. 64
  - Fussartillerie-Bataillon Nr. 80
- Pionier-Bataillon Nr. 140

**Kaiserlich und Königlich 106.Infanterie-Division (Feldmarschalleutnant Karl Kratky)**

- 210.Landsturm-Infanterie-Brigade
  - Landsturm-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 31
  - Landsturm-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 32
- 211.Landsturm-Infanterie-Brigade
  - Landsturm-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 6
  - Landsturm-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 25
- Sturmbataillon 106
- R Schwadron, Ulanen-Regiment 1
- 106.Feldartillerie-Brigade

**XIII. (Königlich Württembergisches) Armee-Korps (General der Infanterie Freiherr von Watter)**

**115.Infanterie-Division (Generalmajor Friedrich Kundt)**

- 229.Infanterie-Brigade
  - Reserve-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 40
  - 4.Lothringisches Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 136
  - 2.Ober-Elsässiches Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 171
- 2.Eskadron/3.Badisches Dragoner-Regiment Prinz Karl Nr. 22
- Artillerie-Kommandeur 115
  - Feldartillerie-Regiment Nr. 229
  - Fussartillerie-Bataillon Nr. 94 (from May 1, 1918)
- Pionier-Bataillon Nr. 43

**28.Infanterie-Division (Generalmajor Rudolf von der Osten)**

- 55.Infanterie-Brigade
  - Füsilier-Regiment Fürst Karl-Anton von Hohenzollern (Hohenzollernsches) Nr. 40
  - Badisches Leib-Grenadier-Regiment Nr. 109
  - 2.Badisches Grenadier-Regiment Kaiser Wilhelm I. Nr. 110
  - Maschinengewehr-Scharfschützen-Abteilung Nr. 37
- 2.Eskadron/Jäger-Regiment zu Pferde Nr. 5
- Artillerie-Kommandeur 28
  - Feldartillerie-Regiment Grossherzog (1.Badisches) Nr. 14
  - Fussartillerie-Bataillon Nr. 55
- Badisches Pionier-Bataillon Nr. 14

**28.Reserve-Division (Generalmajor Konstantin von Altrock)**

- 56.Reserve-Infanterie-Brigade
  - Badisches Reserve-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 109
  - Badisches Reserve-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 110
  - Badisches Reserve-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 111
- 4.Eskadron/3.Badisches Dragoner-Regiment Prinz Karl Nr. 22
- Artillerie-Kommandeur 144
  - Reserve-Feldartillerie-Regiment Nr. 29
  - II./1.Garde-Fussartillerie-Regiment
- Pionier-Bataillon Nr. 328

### DEUTSCHE LUFTSTREITKRÄFTE (GENERAL DER KAVALLERIE ERNST VON HOEPPNER)

- Jagdstaffeln 63, 67, 8, 62, 68, 74
- Flieger Abteilungen 297, 274, 36, 203, 44, 280, 234, 248

**Jagdgeschwader II**

- Jagdstaffeln 12, 13, 15, 19

**Schlachtstaffel-Gruppe 2**

- Schlachtstaffeln 3, 13, 19, 23 (Bayerische)

## ALLIED

### FIRST US ARMY, MEUSE-ARGONNE FRONT (GENERAL JOHN J. PERSHING)

**US I Corps (Major-General Hunter Liggett)**

**77th "Liberty" Division (New York) (Major-General Robert Alexander)**

- 153rd Infantry Brigade
  - 305th Infantry
  - 306th Infantry
  - 305th Machine-Gun Battalion
- 154th Infantry Brigade
  - 307th Infantry
  - 308th Infantry
  - 306th Machine-Gun Battalion
- 152nd Field Artillery Brigade
  - 304th Field Artillery
  - 305th Field Artillery
  - 306th Field Artillery
  - 302nd Trench Mortar Battery
- 304th Machine-Gun Battalion
- 302nd Engineers

**28th "Keystone" Division (Pennsylvania) (Major General Charles H. Muir)**

- 55th Infantry Brigade
  - 109th Infantry
  - 110th Infantry
  - 108th Machine-Gun Battalion
- 56th Infantry Brigade
  - 111th Infantry
  - 112th Infantry
  - 109th Machine-Gun Battalion
- 53rd Field Artillery Brigade
  - 107th Field Artillery
  - 108th Field Artillery
  - 109th Field Artillery
  - 103rd Trench Mortar Battery
- 107th Machine-Gun Battalion
- 103rd Engineers

**1st Tank Brigade (Lieutenant-Colonel George S. Patton) (155 tanks)**

- 334th Tank Battalion (69 Renaults) (Major Sereno Brett)
- 345th Tank Battalion (58 Renaults) (Captain Ranulf Compton)
- French Groupement IV (Chef d'Escadron C.M.M. Chanoine) (28 Schneiders)
  - Groupe 14
  - Groupe 17

**35th "Santa Fe" Division (Kansas, Missouri) (Major-General Peter Traub)**

- 69th Infantry Brigade
  - 137th Infantry
  - 138th Infantry
  - 129th Machine-Gun Battalion
- 70th Infantry Brigade
  - 139th Infantry
  - 140th Infantry
  - 130th Machine-Gun Battalion
- 60th Field Artillery Brigade
  - 128th Field Artillery
  - 129th Field Artillery
  - 130th Field Artillery
  - 110th Trench Mortar Battery
- 128th Machine-Gun Battalion
- 110th Engineers

**92nd "Buffalo" Division (Colored) (Major-General Charles Clarendon Ballou)***

- 183rd Infantry Brigade
  - 365th Infantry
  - 366th Infantry
  - 350th Machine-Gun Battalion
- 184th Infantry Brigade
  - 367th Infantry
  - 351st Machine-Gun Battalion
- 167th Field Artillery Brigade
  - 349th Field Artillery
  - 350th Field Artillery
  - 351st Field Artillery
  - 317th Trench Mortar Battery
- 349th Machine-Gun Battalion
- 317th Engineers

**French 5e Division de Cavalerie (Général de Division Simon)***

- 5e Brigade Légère
  - 5e Régiment de Chasseurs à Cheval
  - 15e Régiment de Chasseurs à Cheval
- 3e Brigade de Dragons
  - 16e Régiment de Dragons
  - 22e Régiment de Dragons
- 7e Brigade de Dragons
  - 9e Régiment de Dragons
  - 29e Régiment de Dragons

**82nd "All-American" Division (Georgia, Alabama, Tennessee) (Brigadier-General William P. Burnham)****

- 163rd Infantry Brigade
  - 325th Infantry
  - 326th Infantry
  - 320th Machine-Gun Battalion
- 164th Infantry Brigade
  - 327th Infantry
  - 328th Infantry
  - 321st Machine-Gun Battalion
- 157th Field Artillery Brigade
  - 319th Field Artillery
  - 320th Field Artillery
  - 321st Field Artillery
  - 307th Trench Mortar Battery
- 319th Machine-Gun Battalion
- 307th Engineers

**US V Corps (Major-General George H. Cameron)**

**91st "Wild West" Division (Western Rockies, Pacific coast) (Major-General William H. Johnston)**

- 181st Infantry Brigade
  - 361st Infantry
  - 362nd Infantry
  - 347th Machine-Gun Battalion
- 182nd Infantry Brigade
  - 363rd Infantry
  - 364th Infantry
  - 348th Machine-Gun Battalion
- 166th Field Artillery Brigade
  - 346th Field Artillery
  - 347th Field Artillery
  - 348th Field Artillery
  - 316th Trench Mortar Battery
- 346th Machine-Gun Battalion
- 316th Engineers

**37th "Buckeye" Division (Ohio) (Major-General Charles S. Farnsworth)**

- 73rd Infantry Brigade
  - 145th Infantry
  - 146th Infantry
  - 135th Machine-Gun Battalion
- 74th Infantry Brigade
  - 147th Infantry
  - 148th Infantry
  - 136th Machine-Gun Battalion
- 62nd Field Artillery Brigade
  - 134th Field Artillery
  - 135th Field Artillery
  - 136th Field Artillery
  - 112th Trench Mortar Battery
- 134th Machine-Gun Battalion
- 112th Engineers

**79th "Cross of Lorraine" Division (Pennsylvania, Maryland, DC) (Major-General Joseph E. Kuhn)**

- 157th Infantry Brigade
  - 313th Infantry
  - 314th Infantry
  - 311th Machine-Gun Battalion
- 158th Infantry Brigade
  - 315th Infantry
  - 316th Infantry
  - 312th Machine-Gun Battalion
- 154th Field Artillery Brigade
  - 310th Field Artillery
  - 311th Field Artillery
  - 312th Field Artillery
  - 304th Trench Mortar Battery
- 310th Machine-Gun Battalion
- 304th Engineers

**3rd Tank Brigade (Lieutenant-Colonel Daniel Pullen) (250 French-crewed tanks)**

- French 1ère Brigade l'Artillerie d'Assaut (Lieutenant-Colonel Émile Wahl)

  505e Régiment d'Artillerie d'Assault (Chef de Bataillon Marc)
    13e Bataillon (Renaults)
    14e Bataillon (Renaults)
    15e Bataillon (Renaults)
    17e Bataillon (Renaults)
    Groupement XI (Saint-Chamonds)
      Groupe 34
      Groupe 35
**32nd "Les Terribles" Division (Michigan, Wisconsin) (Major-General William G. Haan)***
63rd Infantry Brigade
  125th Infantry
  126th Infantry
  120th Machine-Gun Battalion
64th Infantry Brigade
  127th Infantry
  128th Infantry
  121st Machine-Gun Battalion
57th Field Artillery Brigade
  119th Field Artillery
  120th Field Artillery
  121st Field Artillery
  107th Trench Mortar Battery
119th Machine-Gun Battalion
107th Engineers
**29th "Blue and Gray" Division (New Jersey, Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, DC) (Major-General Charles G. Morton)****
57th Infantry Brigade
  113th Infantry
  114th Infantry
  111th Machine-Gun Battalion
58th Infantry Brigade
  115th Infantry
  116th Infantry
  112th Machine-Gun Battalion
54th Field Artillery Brigade
  110th Field Artillery
  111th Field Artillery
  112th Field Artillery
  104th Trench Mortar Battery
110th Machine-Gun Battalion
104th Engineers
**US III Corps (Major-General Robert Lee Bullard)**
**4th "Ivy" Division (Regular) (Major-General John L. Hines)**
7th Infantry Brigade
  39th Infantry
  47th Infantry
  11th Machine-Gun Battalion
8th Infantry Brigade
  58th Infantry
  59th Infantry
  12th Machine-Gun Battalion
4th Field Artillery Brigade
  13th Field Artillery
  16th Field Artillery
  77th Field Artillery
  4th Trench Mortar Battery
10th Machine-Gun Battalion
4th Engineers
**80th "Blue Ridge" Division (Virginia, West Virginia, Pennsylvania) (Major-General Adelbert Cronkhite)**
159th Infantry Brigade
  317th Infantry
  318th Infantry
  314th Machine-Gun Battalion
160th Infantry Brigade
  319th Infantry
  320th Infantry
  315th Machine-Gun Battalion
155th Field Artillery Brigade
  313th Field Artillery
  314th Field Artillery
  315th Field Artillery
  305th Trench Mortar Battery
313th Machine-Gun Battalion
305th Engineers
**33rd "Prairie" Division (Illinois) (Major-General George Bell)**
65th Infantry Brigade
  129th Infantry
  130th Infantry
  123rd Machine-Gun Battalion
66th Infantry Brigade
  131st Infantry
  132nd Infantry
  124th Machine-Gun Battalion
58th Field Artillery Brigade
  122nd Field Artillery
  123rd Field Artillery
  124th Field Artillery
  108th Trench Mortar Battery
122nd Machine-Gun Battalion
108th Engineers
**3rd "Rock of the Marne" Division (Regular) (Major-General Beaumont B. Buck)***
5th Infantry Brigade
  4th Infantry
  7th Infantry
  8th Machine-Gun Battalion
6th Infantry Brigade
  30th Infantry
  38th Infantry
  9th Machine-Gun Battalion
3rd Field Artillery Brigade
  10th Field Artillery
  18th Field Artillery
  76th Field Artillery
  3rd Trench Mortar Battery
7th Machine-Gun Battalion
6th Engineers
**1st "Big Red One" Division (Regular) (Major-General Charles P. Summerall)****
1st Infantry Brigade
  16th Infantry
  18th Infantry
  2nd Machine-Gun Battalion
2nd Infantry Brigade
  26th Infantry
  28th Infantry
  3rd Machine-Gun Battalion
1st Field Artillery Brigade
  5th Field Artillery
  6th Field Artillery
  7th Field Artillery
  1st Trench Mortar Battery
1st Machine-Gun Battalion
1st Engineers
**French XVII Corps d'Armée (Général de Division Henri Claudel)**
**18e Division d'Infanterie (Général de Division Joseph Louis Marie Andlauer)**
32e Régiment d'Infanterie
66e Régiment d'Infanterie
77e Régiment d'Infanterie
71e Régiment d'Infanterie Territoriale
**26e Division d'Infanterie (Général de Division Jean de Belenet)**
121e Régiment d'Infanterie
92e Régiment d'Infanterie
139e Régiment d'Infanterie
3e Régiment de Chasseurs (one squadron)
16e Régiment d'Artillerie de Campagne

**French II Corps d’Armée Colonial (Général de Division Ernest Joseph Blondlat)**
**10e Division d’Infanterie Coloniale (Général de Division Jean-Baptiste Marchand)**
- 33e Régiment d’Infanterie Coloniale
- 52e Régiment d’Infanterie Coloniale
- 53e Régiment d’Infanterie Coloniale
- 18e Régiment d’Infanterie Territoriale
- 41e Régiment d’Artillerie Coloniale
- 2e Régiment de Spahis Algériens (two squadrons)
- 229e Régiment d’Artillerie Coloniale (three *groupes* of 75mm)
- 5e Groupe du 142e Régiment d’Artillerie Lourde (155mm)

**15e Division d’Infanterie Coloniale (Général de Division Maurice Guérin)**
- 2e Régiment d’Infanterie Coloniale
- 5e Régiment d’Infanterie Coloniale
- 6e Régiment d’Infanterie Coloniale
- 18e Régiment d’Infanterie Territoriale
- 22e Régiment d’Artillerie Coloniale (three *groupes* of 75mm)
- 6e Groupe du 142e Régiment d’Artillerie Lourde (155mm)

## FIRST US ARMY UNITS DETACHED TO GOURAUD’S FRENCH 4E ARMÉE (WEST OF ARGONNE)

**French XXI Corps d’Armée (Général de Division Stanislaus Naulin)**
**US 2nd Division (Regular) (Major-General John A. Lejeune, USMC)**
- 3rd Infantry Brigade
  - 9th Infantry
  - 23rd Infantry
  - 5th Machine-Gun Battalion
- 4th Marine Brigade
  - 5th Marines
  - 6th Marines
  - 6th Marine Machine-Gun Battalion
- 2nd Field Artillery Brigade
  - 12th Field Artillery
  - 15th Field Artillery
  - 17th Field Artillery
  - 2nd Trench Mortar Battery
- 4th Machine-Gun Battalion
- 2nd Engineers

**US 36th “Lone Star” Division (Texas, Oklahoma) (Major-General William Ruthven Smith)**
- 71st Infantry Brigade
  - 141st Infantry
  - 142nd Infantry
  - 132nd Machine-Gun Battalion
- 72nd Infantry Brigade
  - 143rd Infantry
  - 144th Infantry
  - 133rd Machine-Gun Battalion
- 61st Field Artillery Brigade
  - 131st Field Artillery
  - 132nd Field Artillery
  - 133rd Field Artillery
  - 111th Trench Mortar Battery
- 131st Machine-Gun Battalion
- 111th Engineers

**French IX Corps d’Armée (Général de Division Noël Garnier-Duplessis)**
**French 161e Division (Général de Division Louis Pierre Modelon)**
- US 369th Infantry (Colored) (93rd Division)

**French 157e Division (Général de Division Mariano Goybet)**
- US 371st Infantry (Colored) (93rd Division)
- US 372nd Infantry (Colored) (93rd Division)

**French 2e Division Marocaine (Général de Division Albert Joseph Marie Daugan)**
**French XXXVIII Corps d’Armée (Général de Division Jean de Montdésir)**
**French Groupement Durand (1er Division de Cavalerie à Pied) (Colonel Rene Durand)**
- US 368th Infantry (Colored) (92nd Division)
- French 11e Cuirassiers-à-Pied

## FIRST ARMY AIR SERVICE (SOUILLY AERODROME) (COLONEL BILLY MITCHELL)

**First Pursuit Group (Major Harold Hartney)**
**First Pursuit Wing (Major Bert Atkinson)**
- Second Pursuit Group
- Third Pursuit Group
- French Groupe de Combat 16
- First Day Bombardment Group

**Corps Observation Wing (Major Lewis Brereton)**
- I Corps Balloon Group
- V Corps Balloon Group
- III Corps Balloon Group

**Army Observation Group (Major John N. Reynolds)**
- Army Artillery Observation Group

**Army Balloon Wing (Major John Pegelow)**
**French 1èr Division Aerienne (elements) (Colonel Albert de Vaulgranet Duval)**

Wisconsin National Guard troops of the US 64th Infantry Brigade, 32nd Division catch a ride near Romagne-sous-Montfaucon on October 18, 1918. The doughboys appear to be driven by French colonials. Both American motor transport and pack animals fell badly short of that authorized. (US Army Signal Corps, public domain)

# OPPOSING PLANS

## TERRAIN AND WEATHER

German forces had held the Meuse-Argonne since August 1914. The region's largest community was German-occupied Sedan, a city of 18,000 along the French–Belgian border, 80 miles northeast of Paris. Routed through Sedan was the four-track Sedan–Mézières railway, which was 30 miles north of the American start line on September 26, 1918. The railway's strategic value and close proximity to American lines made the Meuse-Argonne the only part of the Western Front in which Ludendorff could not afford to trade space for time.

The rugged, 18-mile-wide Meuse-Argonne lay immediately east of Champagne and the Aisne river. With its jumble of steep hills, thickly wooded highlands, and deep ravines, the relentlessly undulating Meuse-Argonne was the Western Front's finest defensive ground. Richard Faulkner observed: "The complexities of the terrain and the German defense required that junior leaders have a 'master's degree' in tactics, while most of the American junior officers were barely out of the grade school of the profession."

The Meuse-Argonne's heavily cratered southern reaches had been shattered by the 1916 Verdun battles, but moving north, the land remained increasingly untouched. On the battlefield's west stands a high limestone plateau, the 863ft ASL (above sea level) Forêt d'Argonne (Argonne Forest). The Argonne is dark and dense, with unusually thick, jungle-like undergrowth concealing its imposingly steep hillocks and creeks. Moving east, the battlefield plunges 423ft into the 460ft ASL Aire River valley, an obvious attack corridor. In the Meuse-Argonne's center rises the high, northwest-trending Barrois Plateau. Atop this "whaleback," 4 miles north of American lines, towers the 1,122ft ASL promontory Montfaucon ("Mount of the falcon"). North of Montfaucon were the whaleback's wooded heights of Romagne and Cunel (985ft ASL),

Doughboys of the US 77th Division gaze at the steep, heavily wooded Argonne Forest in 1918. They appear to be standing on an artillery observation platform. French geography textbooks had long referred to the Argonne as the "Thermopylae of France" because of its notorious military impassability. (National Archives and Records Administration) and, farther north, the 1,122ft ASL Barricourt Heights. Finally, bounding the battlefield on the east was the 580ft ASL Meuse River valley. Along the Meuse's west bank are swampy lowlands draining into the river. Above the Meuse's east bank towered the German-controlled 1,312ft ASL Côtes de Meuse (Heights of the Meuse). "The region was a natural fortress," Liggett claimed, "beside which the Virginia Wilderness in which Grant and Lee fought was a park."

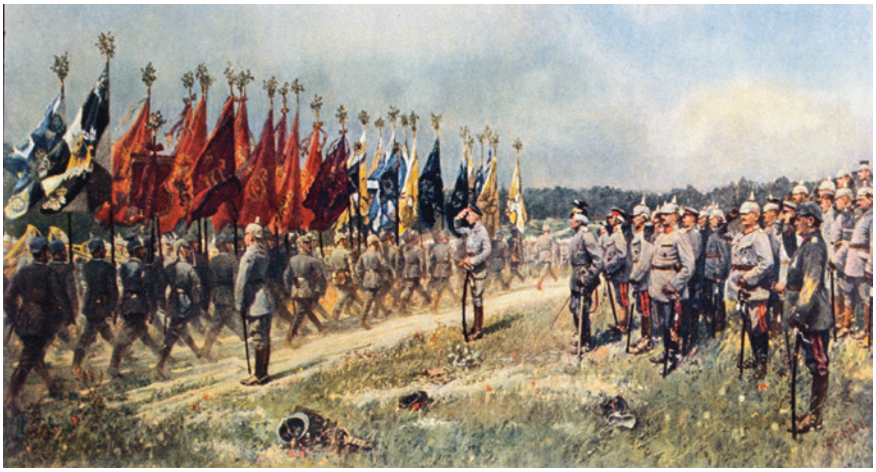
By late September 1918, the Meuse-Argonne's notoriously misty, chilly autumn weather had arrived in force; the 47-day battle saw seven total days without rain. By September 30, men were wakening to frost. "There was more mud and rain and drizzle and fog and wet weather etc., than in Oregon and Washington combined," one doughboy recalled. "During the thirty days I doubt if the sun rose or set; it was daylight, then dark."

## GERMAN

By fall 1918, German military fortunes approached disaster. Ludendorff no longer sought outright victory, but a hard-fought draw. Rather than evacuate to shorter, potentially more defensible lines on the German frontier, Ludendorff sought to use occupied French, Belgian, and Luxembourg territory as political leverage in what most expected would be eventual peace negotiations. German armies would fight and die where they stood.

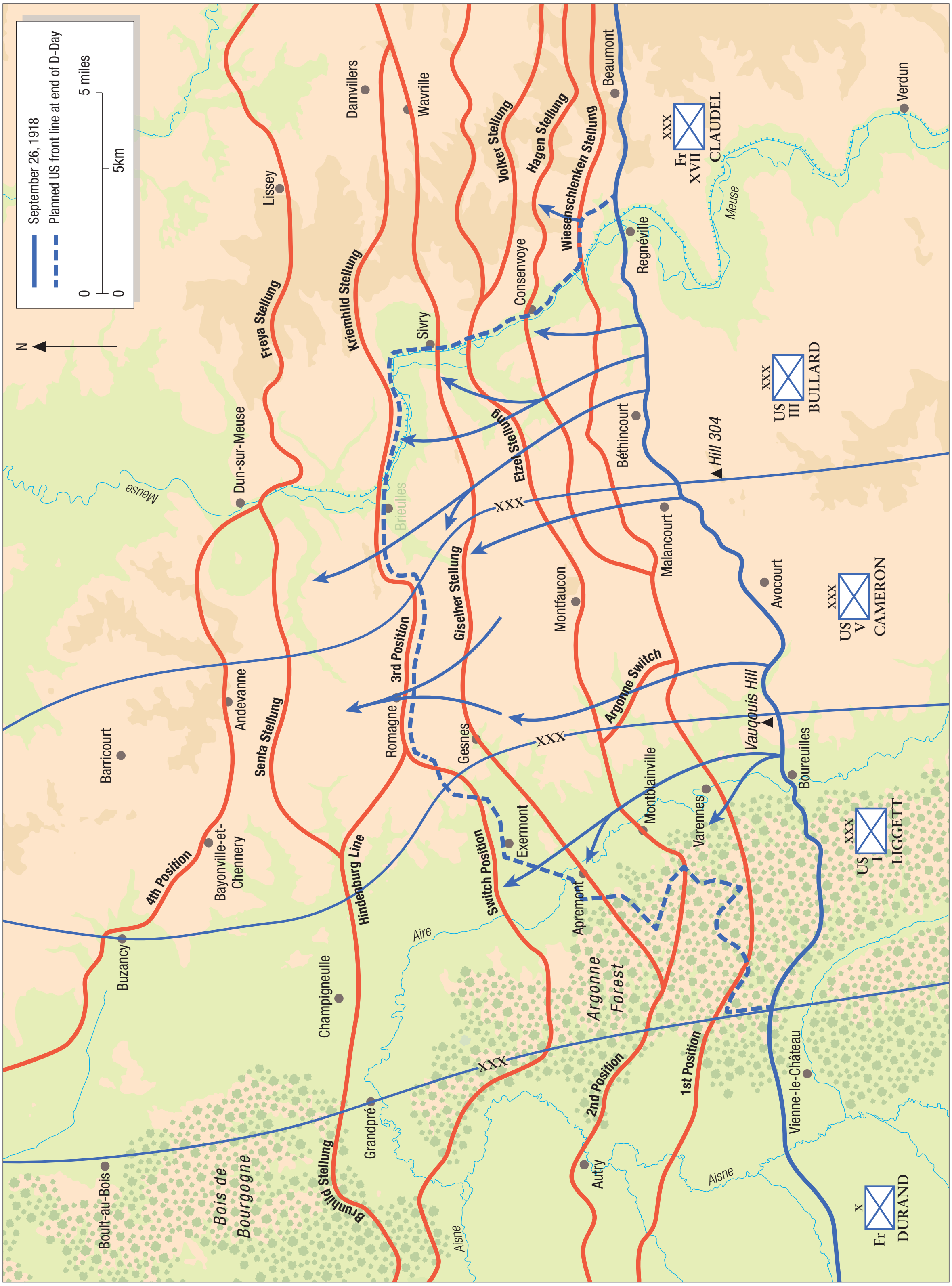
Four major and many lesser east–west German defensive belts comprised the Meuse-Argonne portion of the Hindenburg Line. Combined, they were over ten miles deep:

1. The lightly held **Hagen-Wiesenschlenken Stellung** was the initial belt of German resistance, beginning 30–40 yards north of American lines.
2. The **Giselher-Etzel Stellung** was 3 miles behind the front and included Montfaucon and the central Argonne Forest.
3. The **Kriemhilde Stellung** was 7 miles behind the front and was the main Hindenburg Line belt. It was built into the Heights of Cunel and Romagne, plus the village of Grandpré. In the western Argonne, it was called the **Brunhilde Stellung**.
4. The **Freya Stellung** was 12 miles behind the front and was the weakest, last-ditch line of defense west of the Meuse.



The Argonne Forest, July 1915. Prussia's Kronprinz Wilhelm is seen reviewing troops marching with colors decorated with oak leaves. Wilhelm awarded 600 men the Iron Cross for recent actions here between June 20 and July 2, 1915. German lines at the Meuse-Argonne were virtually identical to what they had been on September 12, 1914, following the First Battle of the Marne. (Archiv Gerstenberg/ ullstein bild via Getty Images)

## First US Army attack plan against Hindenburg Line, September 26, 1918


September 26, 1918
Planned US front line at end of D-Day
0 5 miles
0 5km
N
Freya Stellung
Kriemhild Stellung
Volker Stellung
Hagen Stellung
Wiesenschlenken Stellung
Etzel Stellung
Giselher Stellung
3rd Position
Senta Stellung
4th Position
Hindenburg Line
Switch Position
Argonne Switch
2nd Position
1st Position
Brunhild Stellung
Damvillers
Wavrille
Beaumont
Verdun
Lissey
Consenvoye
Regnéville
Sivry
Dun-sur-Meuse
Brieulles
Béthincourt
Hill 304
Malancourt
Montfaucon
Avocourt
Andevanne
Romagne
Gesnes
Barricourt
Bayonville-et-Chennery
Buzancy
Exermont
Apremont
Montblainville
Varennes
Vauquois Hill
Boureuilles
Champigneulle
Grandpré
Autry
Vienne-le-Château
Boult-au-Bois
Bois de Bourgogne
Argonne Forest
Meuse
Aire
Aisne
XXX
XXX Fr XVII CLAUDEL
XX US III BULLARD
XX US V CAMERON
XXX US I LIGGETT
X Fr DURAND

These defensive belts exploited the terrain's natural landscape, and were lavishly impregnated with barbed-wire entanglements, trenches, machine-gun nests, and poured-concrete bunkers and artillery shelters. Defensive breaches would be met by immediate counterattacks (*Gegenstösse*) to recover the line while the attackers were still disorganized. On the battlefield's flanks, German heavy artillery perched on the eastern Meuse Heights, while field artillery batteries hid high in the Argonne. Together, these German guns enfiladed the entire American offensive. Moving north, substantial German field artillery batteries were echeloned in ravines throughout the Meuse-Argonne's whaleback central highland.

German intelligence suspected the impending Champagne offensive by Gouraud's French 4e Armée. However, as late as September 24, the accompanying, simultaneous American offensive immediately east in the Meuse-Argonne had been almost entirely concealed. Indeed, New York's US 77th Division spoke so much Italian that German intelligence mistakenly reported Italian units deploying into the Argonne. Gallwitz himself believed the AEF would resume the St-Mihiel offensive toward Metz. Historian Rod Paschall observed: "The Germans actually expected to confront what Pershing *wanted* to do, not what he was *ordered* to do."

## AMERICAN

On September 26, First US Army would drive north to breach the Hindenburg Line's main belt on the Meuse-Argonne battlefield, the Kriemhilde Stellung. From there, the Americans would wheel northeast and advance 10 miles to take the railhead of Sedan. By cutting the four-track Sedan–Mézières railway, the Americans would destroy German communications on the southern Western Front, requiring a wholesale German evacuation back into Germany via the difficult Ardennes. If the war continued, the captured Sedan–Mézières railway would support Allied logistics for the planned 1919 offensive into Germany. However, by refusing to abandon the ancillary St-Mihiel operation, Pershing only gave his staff 19 days to plan the much larger and more important Meuse-Argonne offensive. Additionally, to ensure success at St-Mihiel, Pershing used his few veteran divisions there, meaning the Meuse-Argonne would be spearheaded by largely inexperienced troops.

As the Americans advanced north, they would eventually break into broad open country—more favorable for the AEF in every way. US intelligence expected up to 20 additional German divisions to reinforce the Meuse-Argonne by D+3. Pershing, accordingly, stressed maximum speed and violence during the initial attack, expecting his center to drive 10 miles deep and break the Kriemhilde Stellung on D-Day. Considering the large, unwieldy nature of the AEF and its overwhelmingly inexperienced men, this objective was wildly optimistic.

A modern-day view of a German Meuse-Argonne bunker. German morale was spotty and generally low. Once their bunkers were penetrated, defending German troops often surrendered easily. Getting through the machine guns and barbed wire to them in the first place was much more difficult. (Horacio Villalobos/Corbis via Getty Images)

# THE CAMPAIGN

On September 13, 1918, Pershing's First US Army began its massive redeployment from St-Mihiel to the Meuse-Argonne, 60 miles to the northwest. Its initial 15 divisions and three corps headquarters shared a mere three dirt roads and three narrow-gauge railroads. The American transfer's logistical architect, Colonel George C. Marshall, divided the convoys into motor, animal, and foot traffic, dedicating a specific road to each. American, French, and Indochinese drivers drove 15,000 trucks carrying American infantry. To avoid German aerial reconnaissance, American convoys traveled behind French lines entirely at night. Nevertheless, thousands of doughboys had to march, and were accordingly hammered by rain and mud. The American route traversed the shattered moonscape of Verdun; the 1916 battlefield still teemed with thousands of human remains. Americans moving near the German lines wore French uniforms and were implored to give no information if captured.

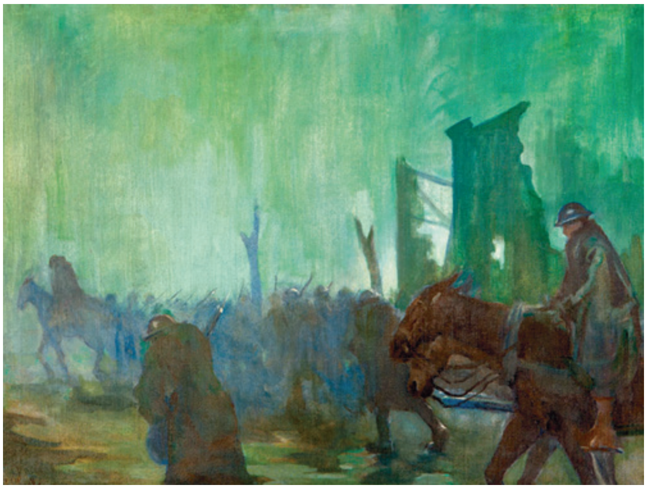
Ludendorff later claimed:

> After the battle at the St-Mihiel front had come to an end, the headquarters of the German 5.Armee thought that the American attacks would be carried on to the north of Verdun, on the eastern bank of the Meuse, not on the western. Full justice must be done to the skillful and far-sighted way—very much like the way the Germans acted before the beginning of their offensive in spring—in which the Americans hid the extensive preparations for their intended attack between the Meuse and the Argonne.

First US Army transferred a total of 600,000 troops, 3,823 guns, 90,000 horses, and 900,000 tons of supplies across the front in two weeks, neatly replacing in the line some 220,000 French troops of French 2e Armée. The French XVII Corps remained to protect Verdun, but passed under Pershing's First US Army, now headquartered at Souilly. At midnight, September 22, Pershing's First Army assumed responsibility for the Western Front between the Aisne and Moselle rivers.

As D-Day approached, Pershing's remaining forces east of the Meuse—the French XVII Corps, French II Corps d'Armée Colonial, and St-Mihiel's US IV Corps—began artillery bombardments and offensive raids against German lines as far east as Pont-à-Mousson, east of St-Mihiel. They were assisted by 16 Renault FT-17 light tanks temporarily detached from Lieutenant-Colonel George S. Patton's 1st Tank Brigade. Continuing through D-Day, these feints were intended purely for deception, with the 10e Division d'Infanterie Coloniale demonstrating east of the Meuse against Dieppe-sur-Meuse.

Inevitably, several French and American prisoners were captured, and may have alerted German intelligence. At 1900hrs, September 25, Gallwitz ordered his first Meuse-Argonne reinforcements forward, the 37.Infanterie-Division and Bavarian 5.Reserve-Division. Miles to the south, in pouring rain, Pershing's assault infantry discarded all but their weapons, helmets, gas masks, overcoats, and light rations, leaving their packs behind in piles guarded by individual doughboys. The long transfer through rain and mud from St-Mihiel meant many doughboys were already exhausted.



The Americans undertake a forced night march in the rain in this painting by participant Samuel Johnson Woolf. Recalling the Meuse-Argonne transfer on September 24, an AEF surgeon marveled at the spectacle of "500,000 armed human beings accompanied by acres of guns—paraphernalia covering the earth—a blanket of destruction ten miles deep, thirty miles long … dragging and lugging this vast carpet of destruction toward the enemy." (US Army)

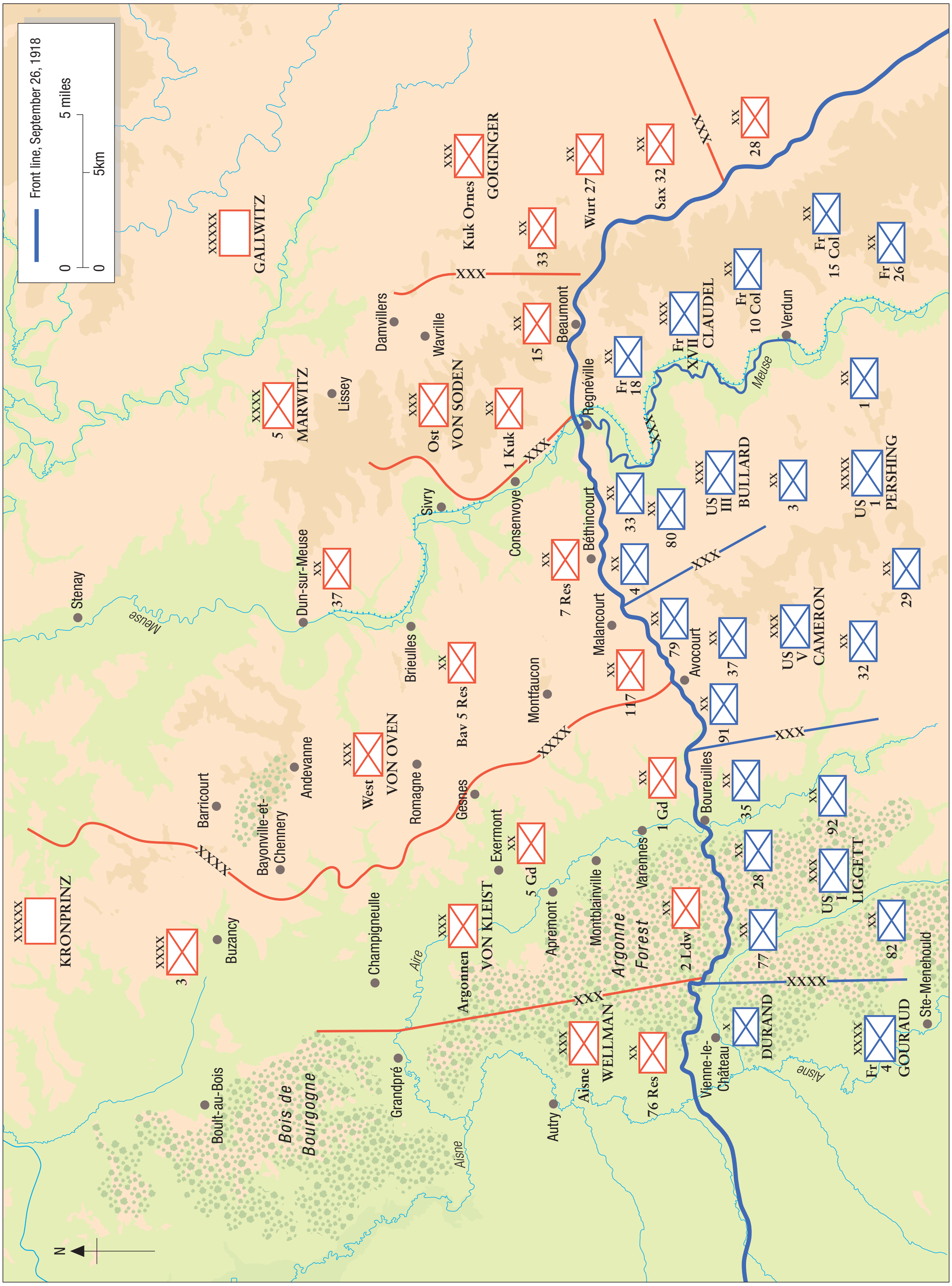
Pershing's nine AEF assault divisions came to 252,000 American troops along the 18-mile Meuse-Argonne front. The resulting battlefield has been described as a funnel, with the Americans in the south attacking north up the spout. First US Army would advance on a broad front; strict divisional boundaries and a smooth front line would be zealously maintained. On the left, Major-General Hunter Liggett's US I Corps would turn the German-fortified Argonne Forest by flanking the wooded highland's right. In the center, Major-General George H. Cameron's US V Corps would drive up the Barrois Plateau. On the right, Major-General Robert E. Lee Bullard's US III Corps would protect the flank and help turn Montfaucon, assisting in US V Corps' capture of the second German defensive line, the Giselher-Etzel Stellung.

## D-DAY, SEPTEMBER 26

At 2230hrs, September 25, the 2,766 guns of Gouraud's French 4e Armée, west of the Argonne, opened fire in preparation for its impending Champagne offensive. Then, 1,291 First US Army guns east of the Meuse-Argonne commenced firing from the St-Mihiel sector, as if the Americans were preparing to resume their aborted drive toward Metz. Finally, at 0230hrs, September 26, the 2,711 French and American guns of the Meuse-Argonne unleashed the preparatory barrage for the Americans' main offensive. The Allied guns averaged one per every 25ft. They were echeloned with the 75mms in front, followed by the 155mms, and then corps and army heavy artillery, including 8in., 9.2in., and 340mm railway guns. As dawn broke, thousands of machine guns added their high-speed percussion. The effect was a "not entirely unmusical" rolling thunder; 26 miles away at his Montmédy headquarters, Gallwitz recalled the windowpanes beginning to rattle. Flying high above the battlefield, American fighter pilot Captain Eddie Rickenbacker observed "a solid belt of flashes, lighting up the world." The US 35th Division's Captain Harry S. Truman, commanding a Kansas City 75mm battery, remembered, "The sky was red from one end to the other," and recalled the thundering barrage left him "deaf as a post."

The largest and deadliest battle in American history was underway. The three-hour preliminary bombardment exceeded in weight all artillery fire

## The Meuse-Argonne at H-Hour (0230hrs), September 26, 1918


Front line, September 26, 1918
0
5 miles
0
5km
XXXXX GALLWITZ
XXX Kuk Ornes GOIGINGER
XX Wurt 27
XX Sax 32
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XX 28
XX 33
XXX
Damvillers
Wavrille
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Beaumont
XX Fr 18
XXX Fr XVII CLAUDEL
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Verdun
Meuse
XXXX 5 MARWITZ
Lissey
XXX Ost VON SODEN
XX 1 Kuk
XXX
Regnéville
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XX 1
Sivry
Consenvoye
XX 33
XX 80
XXX US III BULLARD
XX 3
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Dun-sur-Meuse
XX 37
Stenay
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XX 29
Brieulles
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Montfaucon
Malancourt
XX 79
XX 117
Avocourt
XX 37
XXX US V CAMERON
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XX 91
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Barricourt
Andevanne
XXX West VON OVEN
Romagne
Gesnes
XX 1 Gd
Boureuilles
XX 35
XX 92
Bayonville-et-Chennery
XXXX
Exermont
XX 5 Gd
Varennes
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XXX US I LIGGETT
XXXXX KRONPRINZ
XXXX 3
Buzancy
Champigneulle
Aire
XXX Argonnen VON KLEIST
Apremont
Montblainville
Argonne Forest
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XX 77
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Ste-Menehould
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Autry
Grandpré
Bois de Bourgogne
Boult-au-Bois
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expended by North and South combined in the entire American Civil War. A total of $180 million of ordnance was expended leading up to the morning infantry assault, or $1 million per minute. German counterbattery fire scored its own inevitable hits on Franco-American guns and US infantry marshalling for the main assault.

At 0530hrs, the day's first waves of a planned 152,442 American infantry surged forward across the entire Meuse-Argonne. "The sight," recalled an American private, "was ferociously beautiful." Facing them across no-man's-land were perhaps 45,000 heavily armed and well-entrenched German defenders. The initial American bombardment had badly damaged forward German trenches and knocked out telephone lines, weather stations, and survey and signal posts. Well-versed German troops had quickly abandoned these exposed positions, and retreated to more-fortified lines farther back. Behind the US assault infantry trundled cart-drawn mortars and 37mm guns, followed by signalmen unwinding thousands of feet of telephone wire, and then finally the divisional artillery's horse-drawn 75mm guns. The Americans' creeping artillery barrage was a well-established tactic protecting attacking infantry from defensive fire; the few American veterans advised their green companions to "keep your nose in it." However, as events shortly proved, the creeping barrage advanced much too fast and was unresponsive to actual conditions on the ground. The American artillery bombardment was poorly organized by 1918 standards, and proved less effective than its impressive light and thunder suggested.

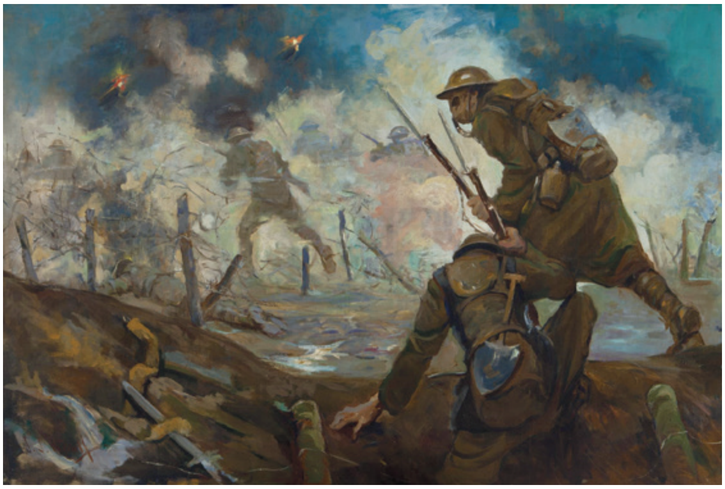
A 34-year-old Captain Harry S. Truman of the 35th Division's 129th Field Artillery in 1918. On September 27, Truman opened fire on a German battery across divisional lines without orders and destroyed it. Minutes later, Truman shouted down a colonel threatening him with court martial. Nothing further was heard of the incident. (MPI/Getty Images)

The previous day's heavy rain had ended overnight. By dawn, thick, seemingly impenetrable fog flooded the Meuse-Argonne's ravines and lowlands. Visibility fell to 30–40ft, unnerving the attackers, but largely handicapping the defenders. By 1000hrs, the fog began burning off, and by noon, the American offensive proceeded beneath gorgeous autumn sunshine. Overhead, the First Army Air Service claimed 20 German planes and three balloons, while 14 American planes fell to Oberleutnant Oskar Freiherr von Boenigk's veteran Jagdgeschwader II.

### *Liggett's US I Corps*

On Pershing's left, Major-General Hunter Liggett's US I Corps advanced up the Aire River valley and along the eastern Argonne Forest. This thickly wooded highland, Pershing's chief-of-staff noted, was "gashed by steep ridges and deep ravines, littered by the debris of many storms, natural and man-made. It was a region forgotten when level ground was being created. Guns could not be driven through it. No man's horizon was more than a few yards away." Theoretically, Liggett's US I Corps would bypass the Argonne to the right, while Gouraud's French XXXVIII Corps bypassed the Argonne to the left. Threatened with double envelopment, the forest's defending German infantry and field artillery would be compelled to withdraw, without a costly and full-scale forest offensive. The French and Americans expected to then converge at Grandpré, immediately north of the Argonne.

On Liggett's left wing, Major-General Robert Alexander's US 77th Division would maintain frontal pressure against the central Argonne Forest,



Samuel Johnson Woolf's *Battle Scene*, an oil-on-canvas work depicting American troops attacking through German barbed wire and gas at dawn. German gunners made liberal use of poison gas. The Germans usually mixed their gas with high-explosives, making such bombardments less obvious to doughboys already reluctant to put their masks on. (US Army)

but was not expected to conquer it. By nightfall, the 77th Division had crept barely a mile forward through the foreboding Argonne terrain, and had lost contact with flanking divisions.

Major-General Charles H. Muir's US 28th "Keystone" Division straddled the Argonne's eastern woods and the open Aire valley. At 0720hrs, they made the usual American frontal assault against the defending Württemberg 2.Landwehr-Division. Down in the Aire valley, the Pennsylvanians assaulted the historic Varennes village at 1000hrs, assisted by 30 tanks. The division's left would remain held up in the Argonne Forest.

To the US 28th Division's right was the US 35th "Santa Fe" Division, composed of Kansas and Missouri National Guard units and augmented by draftees from Minnesota and the Dakotas. Pershing regarded the division's tall, handsome, and devoutly religious German and Scandinavian farm boys as the "best looking lot of men I have got in France." The division was newly commanded by Major-General Peter Traub, a Regular Army officer and an insufferable, incompetent braggart. Just four days earlier, Traub had inexplicably sacked his chief of staff, signals officer, two of three artillery colonels, and all six brigade and regimental infantry commanders. Traub's politically entrenched artillery brigadier, the AEF's worst, was spared. The green 35th Division was thus thrown into chaos on the eve of the offensive, its men and junior officers embittered and bewildered.

Traub's front line cut straight across the obliterated Vauquois promontory, which had claimed 14,000 French casualties since 1914. Vauquois' northern half was defended by the Prussian 1.Garde-Infanterie-Division's 2.Garde-Regiment zu Fuss. As a vicious air battle swirled overhead, Franco-American artillery pounded the shattered butte. Briefly, through the smoke and explosions, two doughboys were observed cheerfully strolling over Vauquois carrying a flag that somehow displayed the "Stars and Stripes on one side and the French tricolor on the other." Vauquois' embattled defenders inevitably found themselves swamped by Americans. A handful of Prussian survivors retreated to Vauquois' 7 miles of tunnels. Their last message was: "We are being attacked from all sides by large masses of the Americans. We will fight to the last man. Long live the Kaiser!" After intense bombardment, Vauquois fell to the US 35th Division's overwhelming numbers.

US Army railway artillery troops fire their heavy railway gun on the opening day of the Meuse-Argonne offensive, September 26, 1918. Railway artillery was deployed both on existing French railways and on US Army rail lines laid specifically for the campaign. (US Army Signal Corps via Getty Images)

An August 3, 2018 photo of the still-scarred Vauquois butte, looking east over what would have been US I Corps' front line on D-Day. The Americans launched their attack north, which is to the general upper left of the photograph. (JEAN-CHRISTOPHE VERHAEGEN/AFP via Getty Images)

Supporting the US 35th Division was Lieutenant-Colonel George S. Patton's 127 American-crewed Renault FT-17 and 28 French-crewed Schneider CA1 tanks of the US 1st Tank Brigade. At 1030hrs, after much foggy confusion and traffic snarls, a dismounted Patton led Renaults of the 344th Tank Battalion and 150 US infantry in an assault against the village of Cheppy, north of Vauquois. Patton was badly wounded and eventually evacuated, handing command to Major Sereno Brett. Assisted by eight Renaults, the 35th Division's 138th Infantry took Cheppy at 1300hrs. By nightfall, combat and mechanical failure would reduce 1st Tank Brigade to 97 tanks. In the coming weeks, First Army's tank strength would dwindle steadily.

At 0930hrs, the 35th Division advanced on Varennes, defended by the Prussian 1.Garde-Infanterie-Division. Lacking artillery support, the Kansas National Guard's 137th Infantry found itself pinned by German machine guns, mortars, and 88mm guns lurking in Varennes' rubble. Overcome by stress, its commander was discovered on his back in a shell hole, spread-eagled and virtually catatonic. Additionally, the division's 138th Infantry commander was injured by a shell. Both colonels were evacuated. The Missouri 139th Infantry then leapfrogged the stalled 137th Infantry, badly disorganizing both. The 35th Division would ultimately advance 3 miles on D-Day, taking Vauquois, Varennes, and Cheppy by late afternoon, but divisional cohesion was already cracking, with Kansas' 137th Infantry having virtually fallen apart.

### *Cameron's US V Corps*

Facing the central US V Corps was 3.Armee's Prussian 1.Garde-Infanterie-Division and 5.Armee's German 117.Infanterie-Division. Attached to Cameron's three American assault divisions were 250 French-crewed tanks of Lieutenant-Colonel Daniel Pullen's US 3rd Tank Brigade. That morning, Major-General William H. Johnston's US 91st "Wild West" Division attacked through the Bois de Cheppy. Almost immediately, the commander of the 91st Division's 182nd Brigade, Brigadier-General Frederick Foltz, displayed concerning signs of gross incompetence. By 0900hrs, Johnston had relieved him. Now commanded by Colonel Henry C. Jewett, 182nd Brigade captured the village of Véry at 1200hrs. The division's 181st Brigade managed to penetrate Épinonville at 1830hrs, but was forced to fall back that night. Johnston's "Wild West" Division had driven 5 miles on D-Day.

To the 91st Division's right was the Ohio National Guard's US 37th Division. By the time the morning fog lifted, the Ohioans had advanced completely through the Bois de Montfaucon. Heavy German sniper and machine-gun fire then poured into the suddenly visible Americans. After fierce fighting "as our forefathers must have known in the forests of the New World," the "Buckeyes" advanced toward Ivoiry, west of Montfaucon.

Doughboys relax on a captured narrow-gauge German *Feldbahn*. Narrow-gauge rail was the primary method of German transportation behind Meuse-Argonne lines. The German occupiers' decision to build narrow-gauge rail instead of improving the region's roads proved a major problem for the American attackers. (*American Armies and Battlefields in Europe*, 1938, public domain)

### *Bullard's US III Corps*

On the battlefield's right, the German 7.Reserve-Division defended 6 miles of front, from the Meuse's western banks to nearly the center of the battlefield. Thinly stretched, the 7.Reserve-Division immediately gave way to US III Corps. On Bullard's left, Major-General John L. Hines' veteran US 4th "Ivy" Division drove an easy 5 miles north, taking the villages of Cuisy and Septsarges, along with 40 German 77mm and 155mm guns, scores of machine guns, and 1,700 German prisoners. In III Corps' center, Major-General Adelbert Cronkhite's 80th "Blue Ridge" Division advanced 4 miles by evening, taking the villages of Béthincourt and Dannevoux. On III Corps' and the Meuse-Argonne's far right, the Illinois National Guard's 33rd "Prairie" Division advanced through Forges Creek's dreary swamp. Slithering east into the Meuse, this miasmic quagmire oozed with the rotting remains of humans, animals, and war materiel from an unsuccessful 1916 French attack. Preceding the infantry, the US 108th Engineers, under fire, erected 15 footbridges across Forges Creek and its bogs. Nevertheless, many assault troops sought cover from German artillery by wading through the chest-deep slime. By noon, the Illinois doughboys had overwhelmed the 7.Reserve-Division and captured the villages of Forges, Drillancourt, and Gercourt, 1,400 prisoners, and numerous German artillery batteries. Upon reaching the inward-jutting west bend of the Meuse, the 33rd Division halted, having achieved all D-Day objectives.

Meanwhile, Maasgruppe West's immediate reserves, the Bavarian 5.Reserve-Division and 37.Infanterie-Division, were ordered forward to counterattack. Heavy American artillery fire bombarded the narrow-gauge *Feldbahn* transporting them to the front line. Hours behind schedule, Maasgruppe West's counterattack finally staggered forward at 1700hrs and promptly collapsed.

Bullard's right-hand US III Corps was now well ahead of its two sister corps. With Pershing insisting on an even front line, III Corps would creep barely a mile forward over the next several days, while Cameron's V Corps struggled to catch up. Bullard had, in fact, already almost reached the Kriemhilde Stellung where it intersected the Meuse at Brieulles.

### *Crisis at Montfaucon*

D-Day's most critical and controversial battle unfolded in the Meuse-Argonne's center, where Montfaucon's 300ft limestone butte loomed over both the battlefield and Pershing's ambitious timetable. From this lofty nest, German artillery observers commanded some 24 miles of front. As part of the Giselher Stellung defensive line, Montfaucon boasted over 130 German dugouts and bunkers, along with mazes of tunnels and trenches. But while Montfaucon's front and flanks were heavily fortified, its northern rear slope was undefended. Driven out of Véry, the 117.Infanterie-Division would withdraw north to Montfaucon early on September 26, bringing German defenders there to 6,665 troops.

Montfaucon stood at the junction of Cameron's US V Corps and Bullard's US III Corps. According to Pershing's attack orders, Cameron's green 79th Division, in the center, would fix Montfaucon's defenders directly ahead, while on Montfaucon's left, Cameron's 37th Division would provide additional support. The decisive blow would come via Bullard's veteran 4th Division, on Montfaucon's right, which would "turn Montfaucon and the section of the hostile second position within the zone of V Corps," and capture German positions "west of Montfaucon"—that is, while V Corps fixed Montfaucon, III Corps' 4th Division would lunge left into V Corps territory and envelop Montfaucon from the rear. Three days earlier, a joint conference of both corps staffs had convened to plan the coordinated envelopment.

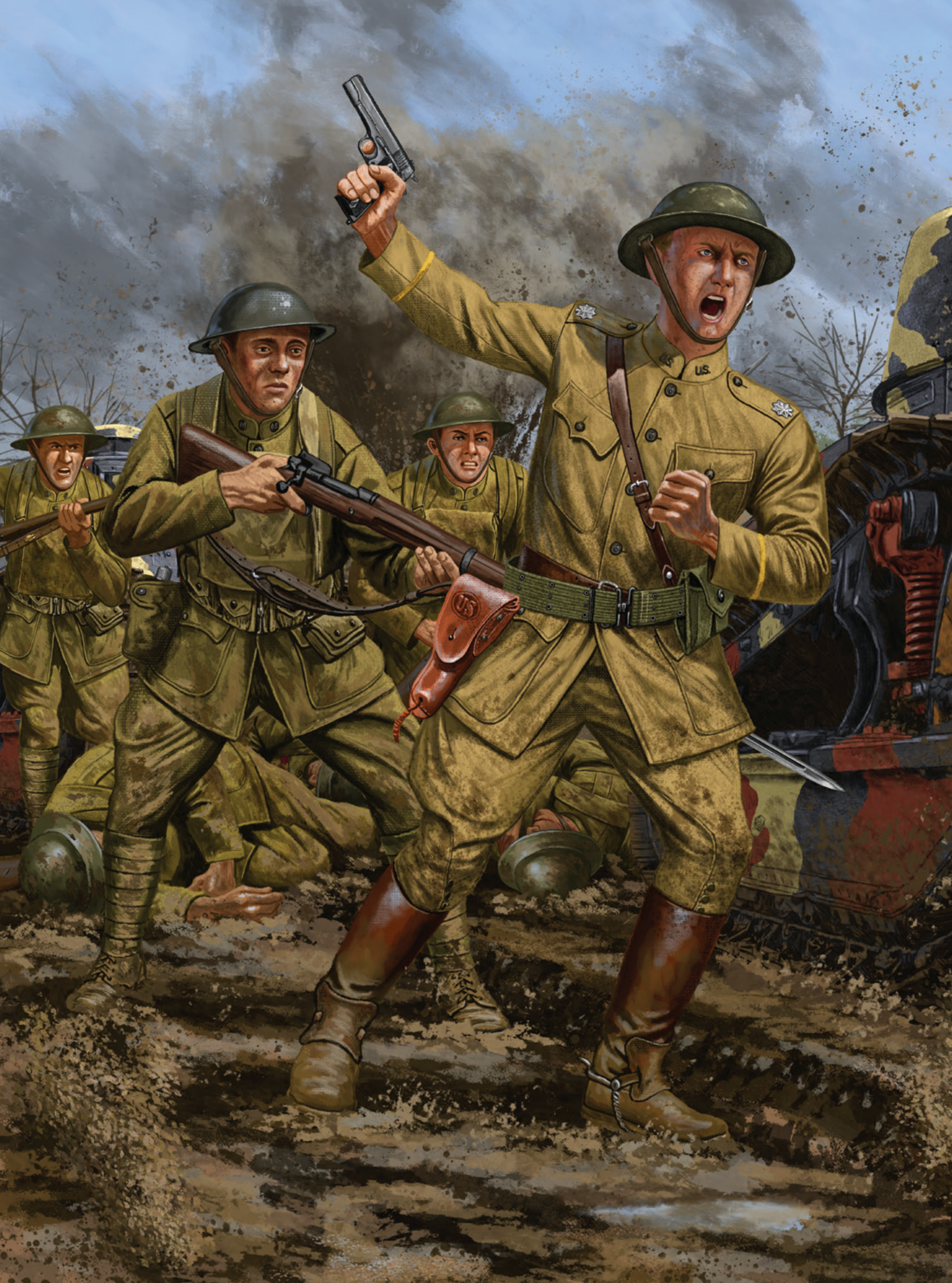
However, Bullard's orders the next morning strangely omitted 4th Division's envelopment; Bullard instead ordered all III Corps divisions to advance straight ahead as rapidly as possible, bypassing Montfaucon entirely. Acting unilaterally, the insubordinate Bullard had thus completely altered First US Army's plan to take the battlefield's most critical objective. Even worse, Bullard never bothered to inform Cameron that he had done so. Responsibility for the strongest and most important German position now fell by default and without warning to Major-General Joseph Kuhn's novice 79th Division, of whom 15,000 men (58 percent) were replacements drafted into military service just four months earlier.

On D-Day, Hines' US 4th Division drove north through German defenses so light, a US officer recalled, "We encountered no resistance whatsoever." At 0900hrs, the 4th Division's far-left battalion got lost in the fog and accidentally veered straight into an unoccupied trench leading directly up Montfaucon. Its commander later admitted, "I know that this was one of those rare battle opportunities, but I regretfully passed up this opportunity to do a grandstand play that might have worked out." By 1030hrs, Hines' 4th Division had already bypassed Montfaucon. One mile west of 4th Division, German troops from Nantillois were observed marching south to reinforce the citadel. The Germans and 4th Division traded long-range small-arms fire, but continued marching past each other as their respective orders dictated.

By midmorning, Kuhn's 79th Division had taken Malancourt, immediately north of the American start line. Moving north, the 79th Division quickly outran its 75mm guns. Without a rolling barrage, heavy German machine-gun fire north of Malancourt cut into 79th Division and pinned it in place; a brigadier-general visiting the division believed the 79th lost as many men attempting to retreat as attack.

Meanwhile, at 1400hrs, Hines' US 4th Division dutifully halted on III Corps' objective line 1 mile north of Montfaucon. Their mission achieved, Hines and Brigadier-General Ewing E. Booth requested permission for Booth's idle 8th Brigade to cross into V Corps' sector and attack Montfaucon

The summit of Montfaucon and its 200ft monument and observation tower, viewed in December 2008. This view faces north-northwest, in the general direction of the American advance toward Sedan. It remains the tallest American war monument in Europe. (Michiel Hendryckx, CC BY 3.0)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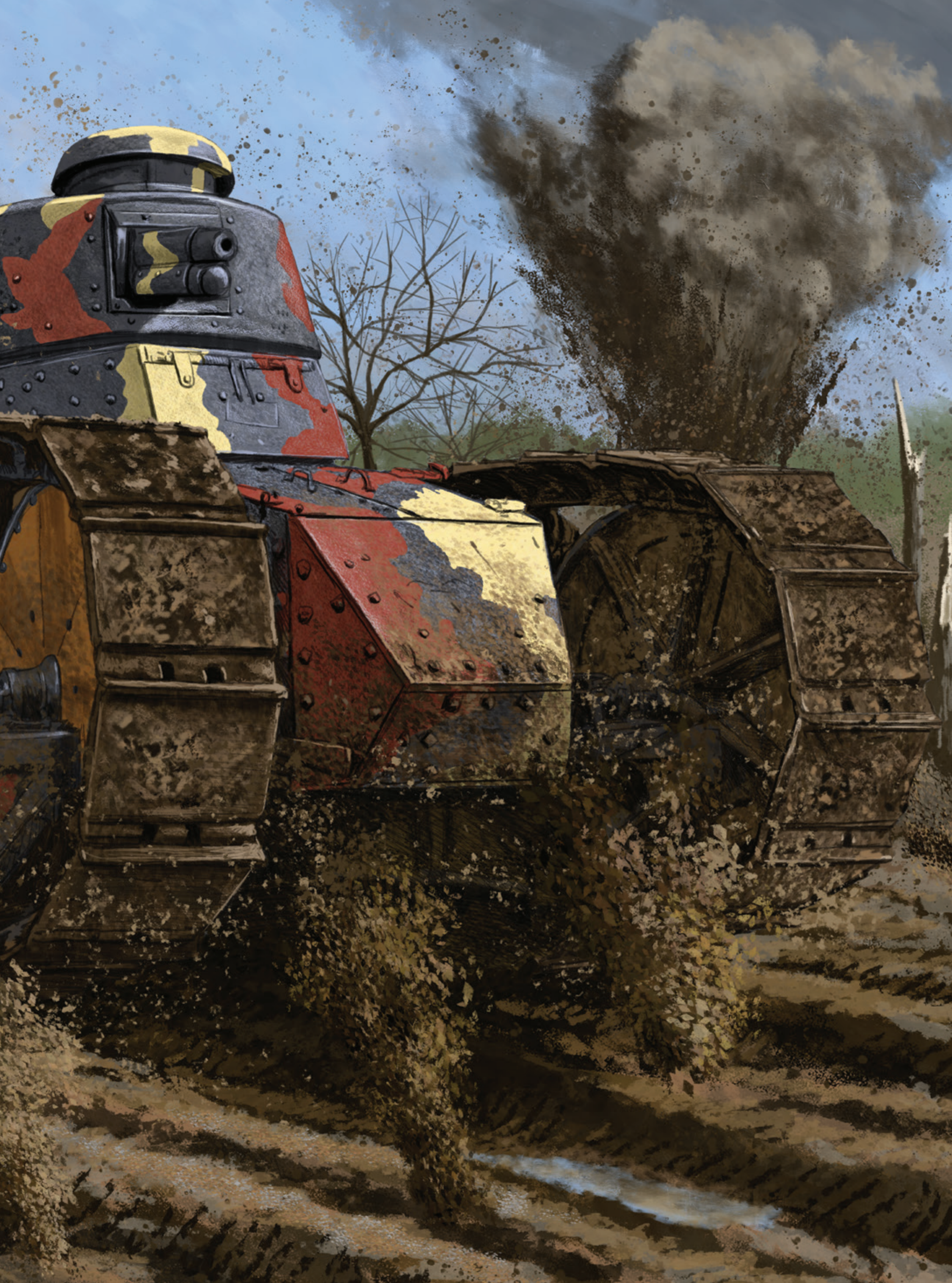
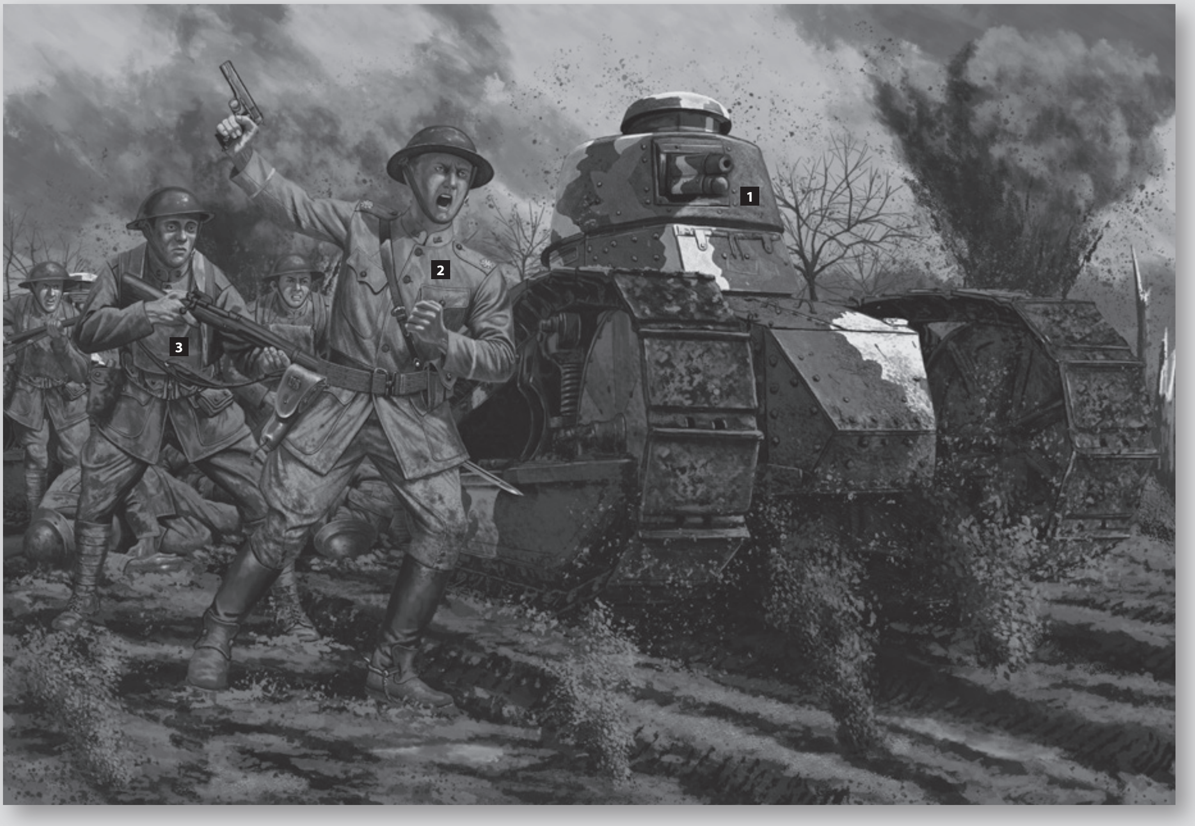




## PATTON LEADS RENAULTS OF THE US 344TH TANK BATTALION AGAINST CHEPPY, MORNING, SEPTEMBER 26, 1918 (PP. 36–37)

On D-Day, Lieutenant-Colonel George S. Patton's US 1st Tank Brigade was to support the 35th and 28th divisions attacking north up the Aire River. Patton was supposed to stay behind in his command post, but he couldn't stand the inaction, and at 0630hrs he charged forward with his staff toward the combined 35th Division/344th Tank Battalion attack against Cheppy.

The morning mist broke at 1000hrs, and German fire became intense and accurate. Patton attempted several times to rally the shell-shocked US infantry milling about the battlefield. He eventually charged forward to a massive traffic jam of immobilized Renaults (**1**) and terrified doughboys under heavy German fire, and began personally shoveling the Renaults out of the mud. Patton later claimed to have hit a cowering doughboy in the head with a shovel: "I think maybe I killed him … It was exciting for they shot at us all the time but I got mad and walked on the parapet … At last we got five tanks across and I started them forward and yelled and cussed and waved my stick and said come on. About 150 doughboys started but when we got to the crest of the hill the fire got fierce right along the ground. We all lay down."

Patton openly admitted his fear. A believer in reincarnation, he later claimed to have looked up into the sky and seen his disapproving ancestors. "Well, I guess it's time for another Patton to die," he told himself, and he got up and announced he was taking out the machine-gun nests. "Who comes with me?" Patton cried, waving his sidearm (**2**). Only six soldiers rose with Patton, and four were immediately shot. Scrambling alongside Patton was his 22-year-old orderly, Private 1st Class Joseph T. Angelo (**3**). A German machine gun quickly shot Patton in the upper thigh; the exit wound tore out a chunk of his buttock. Patton staggered forward 10–15 more yards and collapsed. Angelo then dragged Patton to a shell hole. A delirious Patton was evacuated two hours later. Angelo was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for his actions at Cheppy. Patton called Angelo "without doubt the bravest man in the American Army … I have never seen his equal."

Rallied by Patton, the Americans took Cheppy around 1300hrs. Patton's 1st Tank Brigade lost 43 tanks on D-Day. Patton himself spent the rest of the war convalescing in an AEF hospital. He would not see combat again until November 8, 1942.

from the rear, per the original plan. Fortunately, Bullard was absent touring the front, and III Corps chief of staff Brigadier-General Alfred W. Bjornstad agreed with the envelopment. Bjornstad supposedly began composing the appropriate orders, while Booth prepared 8th Brigade to attack. While this crisis swirled on the right, on the butte's left, a seemingly oblivious US 37th Division patrol wandered up Montfaucon that afternoon and even infiltrated the German-occupied village on the summit, but then withdrew.

Kuhn's 79th Division now found itself forced to make unplanned and unsupported frontal assaults directly up the mountain. Multiple mistaken reports that Montfaucon had been captured further confused the situation. A US balloon observer acknowledged, "Infantry can't take Montfaucon at present, need more artillery preparation." At 1450hrs, Pershing simply retorted that Kuhn's 79th Division was holding up the entire offensive, and demanded that Montfaucon be taken. Shortly after 1800hrs, the 79th Division's left-hand 313th Infantry and two Renault tanks reached Montfaucon's slope. An uphill night attack followed, but German machine-gun fire repulsed first the Renaults, then the 313th Infantry, which lost the 79th Division's last battalion commander in this attack.

Robert E. Lee Bullard seen after his promotion to lieutenant-general. Bullard was highly aggressive, but his full-fledged insubordination in the field went well beyond simply being an independent personality. In this sense, Bullard would have fit right in with the Prussian military culture. (National Archives and Records Administration)

Pershing sent two more messages at 1830hrs and 2330hrs demanding Kuhn immediately take Montfaucon, and then advance 2 miles further toward Nantillois. Pinned by heavy German fire and pelted by cold rain, the exhausted and battered 79th Division could go no further and dug in. As night fell, a second US 37th Division patrol disinterestedly scouted Montfaucon's forward slopes without suffering any casualties, but likewise withdrew. The 37th Division dug in for the night on Montfaucon's western base, half a mile short of Ivoiry. Inexplicably, the Americans never attempted to simply crush Montfaucon beneath a poison-gas barrage.

Meanwhile, just before midnight and just after Bullard returned, III Corps headquarters abruptly canceled 8th Brigade's order to attack Montfaucon—without leaving the required paper documentation. Hines refused to reveal who canceled the attack or why, but after the war, a US III Corps chaplain claimed to have overheard Bullard angrily shouting, "I am not going to help George Cameron win any battle laurels!" An exceedingly rare opportunity to attack the exposed flank of an entire German division was thus squandered. As D-Day ended, the German 117.Infanterie-Division remained firmly in control of Montfaucon.

As it was, the GAC's combined Franco-American offensive had crashed north along a 56-mile front straddling Champagne and the Meuse-Argonne. Pershing's First US Army had won a belt of terrain 2½ to 5½ miles deep along a 12-mile front. As Pershing had planned to drive 10 miles on D-Day, including straight through the Kriemhilde Stellung, this was far less than desired.

Ruins of Montfaucon's destroyed church, seen in August 2010. The stone structure on the left is a German observation tower. Nature has retaken what was then an utterly shattered desert of a village. However, the mist and hazy sky resembles that of the Meuse-Argonne campaign after its opening day. (Public domain)

**AMERICAN**

**US 79th Division (Kuhn)**

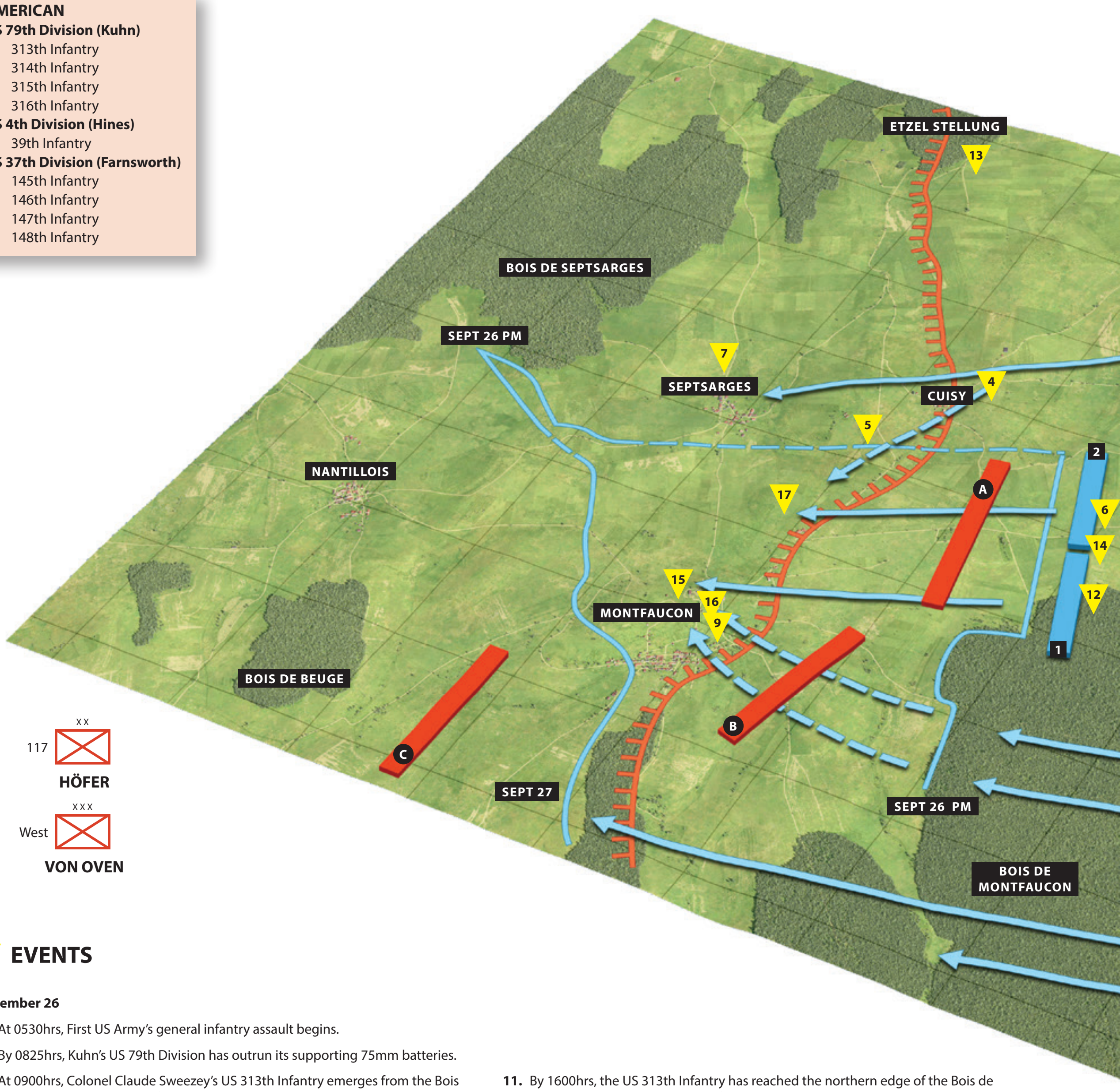
1. 313th Infantry
2. 314th Infantry
3. 315th Infantry
4. 316th Infantry

**US 4th Division (Hines)**

5. 39th Infantry

**US 37th Division (Farnsworth)**

6. 145th Infantry
7. 146th Infantry
8. 147th Infantry
9. 148th Infantry



## EVENTS

**September 26**

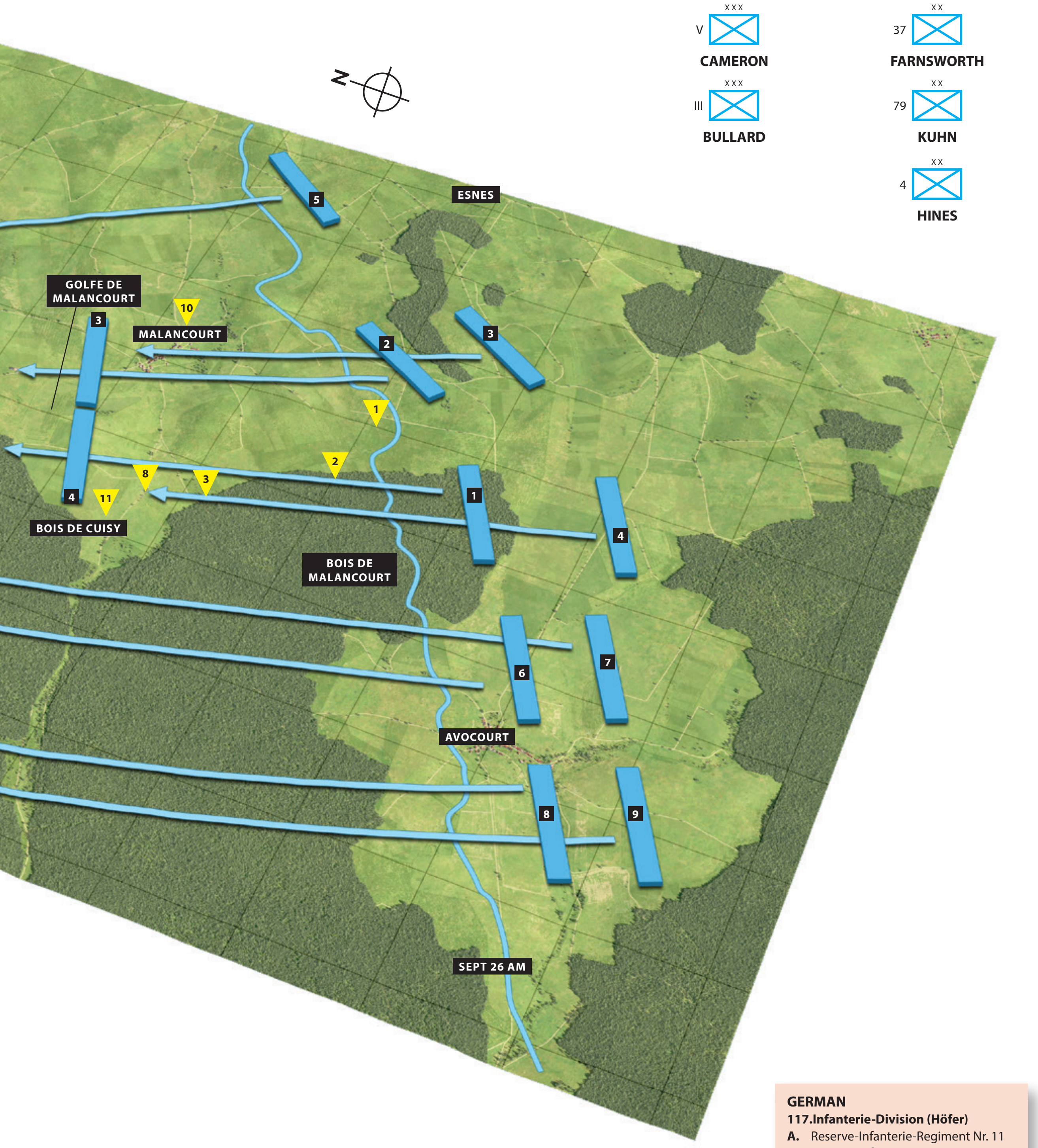
1. At 0530hrs, First US Army's general infantry assault begins.
2. By 0825hrs, Kuhn's US 79th Division has outrun its supporting 75mm batteries.
3. At 0900hrs, Colonel Claude Sweezey's US 313th Infantry emerges from the Bois de Malancourt into the Golfe de Malancourt and comes under heavy German machine-gun fire. Unsupported by artillery, Sweezey asks for tank support.
4. The US 4th Division's 39th Infantry takes Cuisy at 0930hrs.
5. At about 0930hrs, the far-left battalion of the US 39th Infantry gets lost in the morning fog. The battalion strays up Montfaucon in an undefended trench by accident, but upon realizing his mistake, the battalion commander follows orders and withdraws.
6. At 1200hrs, the US 314th Infantry is halted half a mile north of Malancourt.
7. By early afternoon, Hines' US 4th Division, including the 39th Infantry, has secured Septsarges against heavy German fire coming from the Montfaucon area.
8. At 1400hrs, a company of French Renaults from the 13e Bataillon reaches the US 313th Infantry. Realizing no artillery will support him, Sweezey resumes attacking toward Montfaucon.
9. Around 1400hrs, the US 37th Division's 145th and 146th Infantry send patrols uphill that penetrate the Montfaucon village at the summit, before withdrawing.
10. The US 315th Infantry fully captures the ruins of Malancourt at 1500hrs.
11. By 1600hrs, the US 313th Infantry has reached the northern edge of the Bois de Cuisy, but is held up by German fire. Sweezey pauses the regiment to reorganize.
12. In the afternoon, Sweezey is ordered to make another attack on Montfaucon. Supported by two French Renaults, the US 313th Infantry advances 200 yards and is repulsed. At 1930hrs, Sweezey calls off the 313th Infantry's attacks on Montfaucon, having lost seven officers and 79 men. Sweezey's 313th Infantry retires to the cover of the Bois de Cuisy.
13. US 4th Division's planned flank attack into Montfaucon's rear is mysteriously canceled at approximately 2330hrs.

**September 27**

14. US 79th Division's Kuhn fires Brigadier-General Robert Noble at 0430hrs.
15. The 117.Infanterie-Division begins to withdraw from Montfaucon at 1000hrs.
16. Sweezey's US 313th Infantry enters Montfaucon village at 1100hrs and commences intensive street-to-street fighting to clear the ruined town. The 313th Infantry fully captures Montfaucon village by 1155hrs.
17. At 1210hrs, the US 314th Infantry arrives and begins clearing out the Bois de la Tuilerie on Montfaucon's southeast slope. The last German troops at Montfaucon withdraw.

# MONTFAUCON, SEPTEMBER 26–27, 1918

Saddled by severe command and control problems, Kuhn's US 79th Division conquers the Germans' critical forward high point one day behind schedule.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**GERMAN**
**117.Infanterie-Division (Höfer)**
- **A.** Reserve-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 11
- **B.** Reserve-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 22
- **C.** Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 157

Note: gridlines are shown at intervals of 1km (0.62 miles)

# THE AMERICAN OFFENSIVE STALLS, SEPTEMBER 27–30

Gallwitz still suspected Pershing's main blow would fall farther east, at Metz, but Ludendorff had quickly divined the Franco-American strategy to cut the Sedan–Mézières railway. On September 26 and 27, Ludendorff rushed five divisions to the Meuse-Argonne from German strategic reserves: the German 52., 115., 236., and 28.Infanterie divisions, and the Prussian 45.Reserve-Division, increasing German strength to eight divisions in the line and five more in reserve. Marwitz exhorted German 5.Armee:

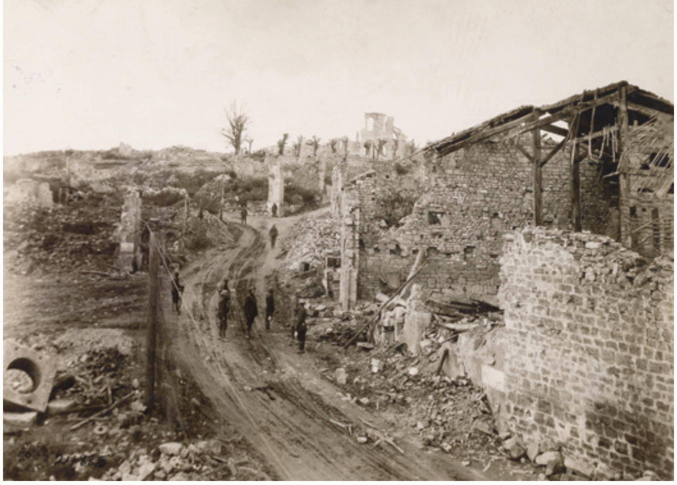
> It is on the unconquerable resistance of the Verdun [Meuse-Argonne] front that depends the fate of a great part of the Western Front, perhaps even of our nation. The Fatherland must rest assured that every commander and every man realizes the greatness of his mission and that he will do his duty to the very end. If they do this, the enemy's attack will, as heretofore, break against our firm will to hold.

A cold rain resumed overnight, and by morning September 27, it was again pouring. The chilly, soaking weather proved the norm and quickly made life miserable for the under-clothed, unsheltered, and increasingly famished American assault infantry. Pershing unrealistically ordered all US divisions to attack at 0530hrs. To his corps commanders, Pershing announced: "All officers will push their units forward with all possible energy. Corps and division commanders will not hesitate to relieve on the spot any officer of whatever rank who fails to show in this emergency those qualities of leadership required to accomplish the task that confronts us."

Supported by tanks, the US 28th Division attacked up the Aire Valley into the Prussian 1.Garde-Infanterie-Division, while the Württemberg 2.Landwehr-Division enfiladed the Pennsylvanians' left flank from the Argonne Heights above. The 28th Division nevertheless captured Montblaineville by 0800hrs, but was then stopped by heavy German fire just north of town.

Knowing Pershing's 0530hrs attack order was impossible, 35th Division staff officers ordered their attack delayed three hours to retrieve some semblance of divisional order. Fearing Pershing's wrath, Traub ordered the 0530hrs attack forward regardless. In the confusion, multiple attack times were inevitably issued. The division staggered forward over the course of several hours, spiraling further into anarchy. By now, elements of the Prussian 5.Garde-Infanterie and 45.Reserve-Infanterie divisions had deployed in front of Traub's US 35th Division to support the faltering Prussian 1.Garde-Infanterie. As the 35th Division advanced through drizzle toward Charpentry, they were battered by German artillery,

A September 20, 2018 view from US I Corps' zone of advance, looking west toward the Argonne Forest. The clear blue sky and early autumn foliage are virtually identical to Meuse-Argonne conditions on D-Day, if not thereafter. (Photo by Sgt. 1st Class John Freese, US Department of Defense; public domain) strafed by German aircraft, and raked by the ubiquitous German machine-gun nests. That evening, the 35th Division finally captured Charpentry and Baulny, its enraged troops bayoneting fleeing Germans. To the 35th Division's right, the 91st Division took Épinonville three times and Éclisfontaine once but was forced to withdraw in the face of German fire each time.


Ruins of the destroyed village atop Montfaucon after its capture by the US 79th Division. Founded in the AD 500s around a monastery, Montfaucon was the site of frequent battles, suffering destruction several times in the 1500s and 1600s, and being captured by Prussians in 1792. (US Army Signal Corps, public domain)

Struggling to attack on time, the 79th Division's Brigadier-General Robert Noble was suddenly fired by Kuhn at 0600hrs, likely to deflect blame for D-Day's failure. Meanwhile, atop Montfaucon, vanguard units of the East Prussian 37.Infanterie-Division continued reinforcing the badly mauled 117. Infanterie-Division. The US 79th Division's 313th Infantry, commanded by Colonel Claude Sweezey, assaulted Montfaucon at 0900hrs that morning, scaling the promontory in the face of ten German machine guns, severe artillery fire, and grenades rolled downhill. Six French-manned Renaults and a single 75mm battery supported them. Atop Montfaucon were the sniper-infested ruins of a long-wrecked village of the same name, which the 313th Infantry penetrated at 1100hrs. Fighting street to street, Sweezey's men captured Montfaucon after 45 minutes of hand-to-hand combat. Hundreds of Germans hiding in bunkers were captured and not a few summarily shot. In taking Montfaucon, the 313th Infantry had lost 45 officers and 1,200 enlisted men.

Virtually without artillery support, Kuhn's 79th Division now advanced north of Montfaucon toward Nantillois, held by the 37.Infanterie-Division. Twenty German fighters strafed the doughboys with impunity. Of the 12 French tanks supporting the 79th Division that afternoon, German fire destroyed nine. Approaching Nantillois, German artillery increased to severe intensity. That evening, 79th Division fell back to the blazing Montfaucon, which German artillery pounded horrifically all night. "From that point on," recalled a US officer, "we began to realize what artillery really meant."

Pouring rains, poison gas, and high-explosives battered Pershing's forward troops the night of September 27/28. By morning, American morale had plummeted. In the Aire Valley, the US 28th Division took Apremont the late afternoon of September 28, then viciously repelled a German counterattack from the north. To their right, the fading US 35th Division captured Montrebeau, but now out in front of the 28th and 77th divisions, the 35th Division was hammered by severe German artillery, both from deep atop the central whaleback and from 16 batteries hidden high in the Argonne near Chatel-Chéhéry. Farther east, the 91st Division finally took Épinonville and Éclisfontaine for good, while the US 79th Division's 315th Infantry captured Nantillois at 1100hrs, along with six German 77mm guns, 23 prisoners, and five machine guns.

Nevertheless, the previous evening, Gallwitz had grown increasingly confident his forces would hold Pershing's offensive. Twenty-four hours later, German prospects looked even better. "By September 28," Gallwitz

A US 35th Division field artillery crew works their howitzer amidst the ruins of Varennes, September 27, 1918. Like most French villages in the southern reaches of the Meuse-Argonne, Varennes had been almost totally destroyed by French and American shelling. (Robert Hunt/Windmill Books/Universal Images Group via Getty Images)

recalled, "we had no more worries." Any chance for a swift and inexpensive American victory had come and gone.

By September 29, New York's 77th Division had virtually ground to a halt in the Argonne, while by 2000hrs, strong German counterattacks had reclaimed Apremont and Le Chêne Tondu ridge from Pennsylvania's 28th Division. One hour later, the Pennsylvanian 55th Brigade unexpectedly re-assaulted the lost Apremont and retook it in night street-to-street fighting.

That morning, Traub's terminally disintegrating 35th Division attacked for the final time in World War I. Staggering forward into severe German firepower, the Kansas–Missourians desperately took La Beauregard Farm, the southern slope of the Montrefagne bluff, and Exermont. The "Santa Fe" division had advanced 6 miles since D-Day, but as the fresh German 52.Infanterie-Division deployed across from them, the clock struck midnight. Supported by crushing artillery fire and the Prussian 1. and 5.Garde-Infanterie divisions, the 52.Infanterie-Division drove the shattered "Santa Fe" back towards Montrebeau. "Concentrated artillery fire," observed Karl von Einem, "struck enemy masses streaming to the rear with annihilating effect." Some 31 American corps and army heavy artillery batteries desperately laid down a curtain of final protective fire. Advancing forward on their own initiative, the 35th Division's 110th Engineers hurriedly established a new defensive line at an exposed Baulny ridge, barely stopping a total German breakthrough. To their right, the 91st "Wild West" Division had driven 3 miles past its flanking 35th and 37th divisions. Badly exposed, much of this hard-fought ground had to be evacuated overnight to avoid potential encirclement.

First US Army had suffered 45,000 casualties by September 29. Attacking US strength had fallen to barely 200,000 men. Meanwhile, reinforcements had brought German defensive strength up to 125,000. This was a mathematically losing formula for straight-ahead attacks. Except for local assaults in the Argonne, Pershing suspended First Army's offensive to reorganize.

## FIRST US ARMY REGROUPS, SEPTEMBER 30–OCTOBER 3

By September 30, the US 28th Division's 55th Brigade was well dug-in at Apremont and augmented by four 75mms. Once the expected German counterattack appeared, the American 75mm guns pinned the German infantry. Then, as Brigadier-General Dennis Nolan had planned, his hidden Renaults, guns blazing, suddenly appeared on each flank of the prone lines of German infantry and commenced neatly running them over. Numerous terrified Germans surrendered, one shaken officer telling Nolan his tactics were "an atrocity."

Traub's 35th Division barely repelled another severe German counterattack on September 30, with the division's 75mm batteries firing over open sights. Late that evening, Pershing replaced the shattered 35th Division with Major-

General Charles P. Summerall's veteran 1st Division, which unwittingly deployed in three ravines preregistered to German artillery. That night, German gunners welcomed the newly arrived "Big Red One" with 3,660 poison-gas shells, inflicting 900 casualties. Meanwhile, the evacuating 35th Division had suffered 7,074 casualties since September 26, including 1,204 killed. Redemption would have to wait for the St-Lô hedgerows of July 1944.

The American traffic jam behind the lines at Esnes, seen on September 26, 1918. Once the offensive was underway, the three US corps would have to share a mere three north–south roads. Of these, only the Route Nationale No. 46 along the Aire Valley was of tolerable quality, but it had been heavily cratered by both French and German heavy explosives. (Corbis via Getty Images)

Cameron's center US V Corps had suffered a combined 11,367 casualties. Pershing removed all three of Cameron's front-line divisions and replaced them with the 32nd Division and the 5th Division. Bullard's right-wing III Corps had been most successful so far, and none of its divisions were replaced. Bullard, however, transferred the 80th Division to the left of the 4th Division. On the left bank of the Meuse, the 33rd Division continued to anchor First US Army's far right. Pershing reduced the oversized American infantry companies from 250 to 175 men, and forbade further headlong attacks into German machine-gun nests. Additionally, Pershing now allowed division and corps commanders freer rein—unit boundaries were no longer sacrosanct and commanders were to maximize initiative.

Meanwhile, heavy rain, crushing traffic, and wretched US traffic discipline shortly transformed the Meuse-Argonne's few roads into virtually impassible quagmires. Guns and heavy equipment slid into ditches or water-filled shell holes, choking roads for hours. On September 29, volatile French premier Georges Clemenceau had insisted on visiting newly liberated Montfaucon—in the midst of Pershing's seven-division, 125,000-strong troop transfer. "Le Tigre" never made it. Ensnarled by the enormous First Army traffic jam, an enraged Clemenceau stormed back to Paris and demanded Foch somehow fire Pershing for incompetence. "The Americans have got to learn sometime," Foch responded. "They are learning now, rapidly."

Nevertheless, the Americans' dubious professionalism concerned Foch as well. All Allied offensives were going well, except Pershing's. On September 30, Foch suggested strengthening First US Army's right, but unifying the Argonne command by subordinating the left-wing US 77th and 28th divisions under French 4e Armée. Pershing categorically refused. Foch accepted, but gratuitously reminded Pershing: "Your attacks [must] start without delay and that, once begun, they be continued without any interruptions as those just arisen." Deeply insulted, Pershing nearly broke off all communication with Foch, but within a few days, tempers cooled and the volatile pair again reconciled.

### *Alexander's US 77th Division attacks the Argonne, September 30–October 3*

Of Pershing's divisions, only Major-General Robert Alexander's US 77th Division attacked on September 30. Battering away in the Argonne, late that evening, it captured the huge German supply dump Depôt des Machines, full of heavy equipment. The division also rescued four companies encircled at the Moulin de l'Homme Mort since September 28.

The US 77th Division's Argonne attacks resumed at 0630hrs, October 2 to take the east–west Binarville–Apremont road. Alexander bombastically demanded all units press forward at all costs "without regard to flanks or casualties." Casualty reports were mocked and withdrawals absolutely refused. Nevertheless, by late evening, the Germans had repulsed all American and flanking French units but two battalions of the US 308th Infantry. Working their way through German fire, Major Charles W. Whittlesey's 1/308th and Captain George G. McMurtry's 2/308th, their flanks unknowingly exposed, had exploited a temporary gap between the German 76.Reserve-Division and the Württemberg 2.Landwehr-Division, then driven half a mile deep into German lines. After dashing across a creek-spanning footbridge, the combined American force clambered up a steep western Argonne ridge near the Moulin de Charlevaux (Charlevaux Mill). Halfway up, they secured their objective, the Binarville–Apremont road. After reporting their success, the Americans established a 380 by 80-yard east–west pocket on the wooded hill's steep, 60-degree southern slope and dug in. Late that evening, the Hessian Regiment Nr. 254 and the Württemberg Regiment Nr. 122 sealed the gap with Whittlesey's and McMurtry's men inside, then strung the perimeter with barbed wire before reinforcing the newly established *Kessel* (encirclement) with machine guns, trench mortars, and additional infantry companies.

By morning, October 3, Captain Nelson M. Holderman's Company K slipped through to the dug-in 308th troops. The impromptu pocket now comprised 694 Americans of the 308th Infantry's companies A, B, C, E, G, and H; the 307th Infantry's Company K; and the 306th Machine-Gun Battalion's companies C and D. As senior officer present, Whittlesey dispatched runners to establish contact with the expected flanking French and American units. All either got lost or were killed or captured by German forces. Whittlesey then began releasing homing pigeons, but German troops shot them down. By now, Whittlesey had begun to realize he was surrounded. Within hours, the Americans' food and water would run out.

But German officers also had reason for anxiety. Whittlesey had lodged his pocket deep behind the Argonne's Giselher-Etzel Stellung defensive line; the dangerous lodgment needed to be crushed at all costs. Consequently, throughout October 3, Whittlesey's pocket suffered the first of repeated German assaults.

Foch and Pershing, 1918. Pershing lacked Foch's intellectual vigor, and often seemed to chafe under Foch's command. Nevertheless, both men owned a strategically aggressive bent, and they likewise shared a deep personal animosity toward Germany that went beyond the average Allied general's. Despite their obvious differences, they made a surprisingly effective team. (Bettmann via Getty Images)

### *Aerial combat*

Among Pershing's disappointments was Mitchell's air support. Rainy weather had somehow frequently grounded the American air force, but not its outnumbered German counterpart. Additionally, Mitchell's misguided interdiction strategy had left the front virtually undefended. German aircraft ranged freely over the lines; some 28 German planes would bomb US 91st Division headquarters on October 2, while German fighters typically strafed American infantry at will. Mitchell also proved nonchalant about countering the German artillery's excellent aerial observation.

2nd Lieutenant Frank Luke exudes steely defiance in front of his SPAD S.XIII fighter, September 19, 1918. He has just ten days to live. The Phoenix, Arizona native posthumously received the US Air Service's first Medal of Honor. Arizona's Luke Air Force Base was named after him in 1941. (Bettmann via Getty Images)

Throughout September, Jagdgeschwader II's veteran German aces had torn into the novice American airmen. "The bravery of American flyers," Gallwitz nevertheless observed, "amounted almost to recklessness." Upon interrogating captured American pilots, German officers discovered they were often wealthy, socially elite Ivy League collegians, who knew little about the war; to them, combat was just another varsity sport. America's top two aces, however, were working-class sons of German parents. Captain Eddie Rickenbacker, commander 94th Aero Squadron, would shoot down 15 enemy aircraft during the Meuse-Argonne, making him the war's leading American ace with 26 kills. But Rickenbacker's dash paled next to the 27th Aero Squadron's 2nd Lieutenant Frank Luke, a relentlessly defiant 21-year-old loner who reveled in the harrowing art of balloon-busting.

Luke's short but brilliant career commenced with his first confirmed aerial victory on September 12, 1918. After scoring his 14th and 15th kills on September 28, Luke landed at an unauthorized French airfield to spend the night. Upon returning to base the following morning, Luke found himself accused of desertion and an AEF warrant was issued for his arrest. Hardly the surrendering type, Luke flew his SPAD S.XIII fighter to a forward Meuse-Argonne airfield. That evening, spying three German observation balloons over Dun-sur-Meuse, Luke took off to shoot them down. After flaming two unconfirmed Fokkers and all three balloons, Luke was shot through the chest by German antiaircraft fire. Severely wounded, the American glided his SPAD down toward Murvaux, strafing the village's packed German infantry while crash-landing. Chased by German troops, Luke staggered 200 yards toward a creek and collapsed. Drawing his Colt .45 M1911, Luke fired several rounds at his German pursuers before expiring with 18 total victories in as many days. "He was the most daring aviator and greatest fighter pilot of the entire war," Rickenbacker reflected. "He went on a rampage and shot down 14 enemy aircraft, including ten balloons, in eight days. No other ace, even the dreaded Richthofen, had ever come close to that."

## *The German situation*

By September 30, German 5.Armee had suffered 8,307 casualties, over two-thirds from the 117.Infanterie-Division and 7.Reserve-Division. By now, Gallwitz had transferred his headquarters deeper to the rear, from Montmédy to Longwy. Simultaneously, Gallwitz withdrew the shattered Prussian 1.Garde-Infanterie-Division, replacing it with the Prussian 5.Garde-Infanterie-Division and 52.Infanterie-Division. Gallwitz also withdrew the battered 117.Infanterie-Division and replaced it with the 115.Infanterie-Division, the 236.Infanterie-Division, and the Bavarian 5.Reserve-Division.

American infantry of the 77th Division rest amidst shattered Argonne Forest trees, October 15, 1918. Recruited largely from New York, the 77th Division's Italians, Jews, Poles, and countless other ethnicities spoke scores of languages; several thousand Jews spoke German. In a true culture clash, the 77th Division's New Yorkers were augmented by recent replacements from California, the Rockies, and the Midwest. (Mondadori Portfolio by Getty Images)

In the west, the German 37.Infanterie-Division retired 3 miles to prepare defenses at Exermont. Deploying north of Cunel was the arriving 28.Infanterie-Division. By October 2, seven German divisions were in the line between the Aisne and Meuse rivers. Behind them in immediate reserve were three more German divisions. East of the Meuse, the German 7.Infanterie-Division faced Pershing's French XVII Corps. On October 6, Ludendorff would transfer von Kleist's Argonnen Gruppe to Marwitz's 5.Armee, largely unifying German command under Heeresgruppe Gallwitz. Only 76.Reserve-Division, in the far western Argonne Forest, remained under von Einem's 3.Armee.

Ludendorff also reinforced German Meuse-Argonne airpower with Prussia's last two elite fighter groups. The first was Jagdgeschwader I—the late Manfred von Richthofen's "Flying Circus," now commanded by Oberleutnant Hermann Göring. They arrived on October 9, having fought at St-Mihiel since September 25. Arriving alongside them was Hauptmann Bruno Loerzer's Jagdgeschwader III.

## TAKING THE ARGONNE FOREST, OCTOBER 4–11

On October 4, Pershing renewed First US Army's offensive. Pershing's overriding priority was to eliminate the German artillery enfilading the Americans from the Argonne Heights on the left and the Meuse Heights on the right. The only option was to directly attack the steep highlands that bounded both American flanks. "What followed," states an official US Army narrative, "were two of the bloodiest weeks in American history."

At 0535hrs, October 4, the US 1st Division attacked along the Aire River's eastern bank, advancing north behind a rolling barrage. Across the Aire, Pennsylvania's US 28th Division drove north nearly 1 mile. Supporting both divisions were about 45 Renaults, out of 89 still operational. The "Big Red One" broke through the weakened Prussian 5.Garde-Infanterie-Division and 52.Infanterie-Division, recapturing Montrebeau, Ferme des Granges, Exermont, and La Beauregard Ferme, before permanently securing the wooded heights of Montrefagne the following morning. The October 4–5 fighting had cost US 1st Division 3,500 casualties.

By now, sensationalist American reporters had discovered Whittlesey's desperate situation in the Argonne. They immediately dubbed the entire group "the Lost Battalion." Transatlantic cable meant the entire United States quickly knew, by October 5, that over 600 American boys were trapped behind German lines. The Lost Battalion's ordeal immediately became the most-publicized American episode of the war.

Doughboys of the US 1st Division run for cover from German fire at Exermont, October 7, 1918. A dead German and disabled Renault FT are visible on the right. Exermont had been the culminating point of the US 35th Division before it was driven back on September 29. Much of the 35th Division's conquests would have to be retaken at high cost by the 1st Division. (US Army Signal Corps/Corbis via Getty Images)

With the entire nation now following the Lost Battalion, Pershing demanded Whittlesey's men be rescued, and quickly. Fortunately, US 1st Division's success driving 3 miles north into Exermont provided Liggett the operational space to change strategies. Liggett would jam his corps reserve, the 82nd "All-American" Division, into this recently opened area between Fléville and Chatel-Chéhéry. Together, the 28th and 82nd divisions would wheel left and attack directly west into the Argonne's flank, 3 miles behind the forest's fortified Giselher-Etzel line. With multiple divisions deep in their rear, Liggett reasoned, the Germans must either withdraw or be destroyed. The bold maneuver would nonetheless leave 82nd Division's right flank open to counterattacks and enfilading fire.

Overnight on October 6/7, the US 82nd Division's 28,000 men marched 8 miles through rain to reach their jumping-off point. The 82nd and 28th divisions attacked at 0500hrs, October 7. They would have to cross 1 mile of the low, wide-open Aire Valley and ford the 2–3ft-deep Aire before assaulting the steep, 420ft-tall Argonne Heights against prepared German positions. Throughout their 2-mile slog through open lowland, murderous German artillery and machine-gun fire rained down on them from the commanding Argonne, inflicting hundreds of casualties. However, by nightfall October 7, the 28th Division had taken Chatel-Chéhéry and Hill 244, while the 82nd Division had captured Hill 223 and repulsed all German counterattacks. To the south, after ten days of intense and prolonged fighting, the 28th Division finally captured the full Le Chêne Tondu ridge and its Giselher-Etzel fortified line.

### *The Lost Battalion, October 4–7*

Meanwhile, trapped in the Argonne's western reaches, Whittlesey's men repelled multiple German attacks the morning of October 4. Then, at 1330hrs, a US 77th Division artillery barrage opened fire on the wrong coordinates, which happened to be the Lost Battalion's location. After enduring murderously severe "blue-on-blue" shelling, Whittlesey released Cher Ami, the battalion's last homing pigeon. Seconds later, "A shell exploded directly below the bird, killing five of our men and stunning the pigeon so that it fluttered to the ground midway between the spring and the bridge we crossed to get into the Pocket." Amidst German fire attempting to shoot her down, Cher Ami again staggered aloft and this time escaped the cataclysmic forest. Twenty-five minutes later, at 77th Division headquarters far to the rear, Cher Ami fluttered home. She suffered from a bullet hole through her breast and one eye and one leg shot away, but she successfully delivered Whittlesey's message: "We are along the road paralell [sic] 276.4. Our artillery is dropping a barrage directly on us. For heavens sake stop it."

The two-hour friendly fire barrage lifted at 1530hrs, having inflicted 110 American casualties, including 30 killed. Immediately, German troops attacked Whittlesey's trenches with grenades and machine-gun fire, badly mauling E Company and capturing two US officers, 13 men, and three machine guns before being repulsed. Upon interrogation, the captured American lieutenants apparently convinced German officers that they were facing 1,200 well-fed New York "gangsters."

On October 5, flying dangerously low, a US 50th Aero Squadron plane finally ascertained the Lost Battalion's location. Riddled by German fire, the American plane staggered home and crash-landed, its two-man crew reporting Whittlesey's coordinates just before dying. The following day, October 6, the 50th Aero Squadron began resupply drops, but all fell outside the pocket into German lines. That same day, the 76.Reserve-Division's Regiment Nr. 254 launched four unsuccessful assaults against Whittlesey's pocket. At one point, a German potato-masher grenade exploded near McMurtry, who fought the rest of the Argonne battle with the grenade's 18in.-long wooden handle protruding from his right shoulder.

Charles W. Whittlesey, late 1918, after his promotion to lieutenant-colonel. He is wearing his Medal of Honor. Like his second-in-command McMurtry, Whittlesey was a New York lawyer and Harvard Law graduate. Before the war, Whittlesey had joined the American Socialist Party, but he had eventually become disillusioned with the socialists' extremism and resigned. (US Army, public domain)

Throughout the protracted siege, Whittlesey had made a point to repeatedly visit each foxhole and talk to every single man face-to-face. He would inspire them with quiet speeches comparing their situation to Lucknow and similar legendary sieges of history. Lacking Whittlesey's classical education, the Lower East Side toughs would respectfully listen until Whittlesey left for the next foxhole, then chuckle at battles they had never heard of. However, late on October 6, a severely wounded US lieutenant sent Whittlesey a note respectfully suggesting that, if not rescued, they surrender the following noon. Whittlesey crawled to the lieutenant's foxhole to cheer him up. When that did not work, Whittlesey snapped, "There is going to be no surrender," then ordered a nearby noncom: "If you see any signs of anybody surrendering or see a white flag or anything, you shoot him!" But unknown to the Americans, at noon, von Einem had informed Aisne Gruppe's Generalleutnant Richard Wellman that he had 36 hours to destroy the American pocket before all units were to withdraw from the Argonne to the Kriemhilde Stellung. Wellman requested *Stosstruppen* (stormtroops) for 76.Reserve-Division's final effort.

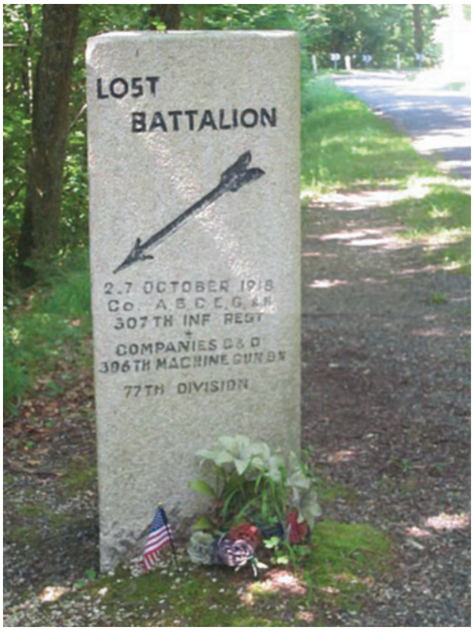
By October 7, it was becoming increasingly difficult for Whittlesey to prevent desperate American troops from attempting their own unauthorized breakouts. That morning, Private Crowell Hollingshead and eight other Americans, defying Whittlesey's standing orders, snuck out of the battalion redoubt to forage for food and "fight it out with the Germans." They got their wish; the Germans killed five and captured the rest, all wounded. Only Hollingshead could still walk. Back at Whittlesey's pocket, the Americans repelled another German attack at noon. Then, at 1600hrs, a German guard appeared with a white flag and a limping Hollingshead. The American bore a note typed by his German interrogator, the Regiment Nr. 254's handsome, genteel Leutnant Heinrich Prinz:

> The Bearer of the present, Cowell [sic] R. Hollingshead, has been taken prisoner by us on October [blank]. He refused to the German Intelligence Officer every answer to his questions and is quite an honourable fellow, doing honour to his fatherland in the strictest sense of the word.
>
> He has been charged against his will, believing in doing wrong to his country, in carrying forward this present letter to the Officer in charge of the 2nd Batl. J.R. 308 of the 77th Div. With the purpose to recommend this Commander to surrender with his forces as it would be quite useless to resist more in view of the present conditions.
>
> The suffering of your wounded men can be heard over here in the German lines and we are appealing to your human sentiments. A with [sic] Flag shown by one of your men will tell us that you agree with these conditions.
>
> Please treat the Crowell R. Hollingshead as an honourable man. He is quite a soldier we envy you.

Whittlesey read it silently, then wordlessly passed it to his officers. The seemingly magnanimous German note urging surrender had quite the opposite effect from its intent. McMurtry recalled:

> There was a good smile all around among the crowd of us, because, first we knew that the Germans felt that they could not take us and secondly … the fact that they had tried to wipe us out every day and had been trying to wipe us out every day since we had been in the position and then had written us a note stating that they would like to have us surrender in the name of humanity, it didn't just exactly "g" in our minds.

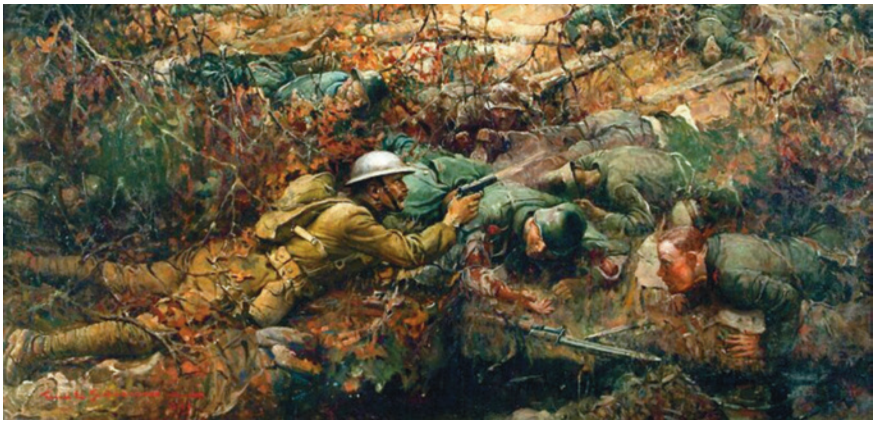
Whittlesey silently folded the note and put it in his pocket. Without a word or look of admonishment, Whittlesey ordered Hollingshead to return to his post, then ordered the battalion's white airplane signaling panels removed lest they be mistaken for truce signals.



The site of the Lost Battalion is well-established and remains largely unaltered. It can be reached via the old Binarville–Apremont road, which is now the D442 highway. A simple marker points down the wooded slope toward the Charlevaux ravine. Many of the 77th Division's men had never seen a forest before, as the 77th largely comprised New Yorkers from the Lower East Side. The division's men spoke 42 different languages; about a quarter spoke German. (American Battle Monuments Commission, *World War I Battlefield Companion*)

The surrender apparently rejected, at 1700hrs the increasingly desperate Germans unleashed their final and most severe attack to destroy Whittlesey's pocket, this time augmented by 16 *Stosstruppen*, trench mortars, grenades, and five flamethrowers. The close-quarters assault unexpectedly triggered a bloodthirsty rage in the battered Americans, who ferociously repelled the two-hour German attack in vicious hand-to-hand combat. Their last attack having failed, the 76.Reserve-Division began evacuating the Argonne. Minutes after the attack ended, at 1900hrs, a US 77th Division patrol broke through to Whittlesey's pocket. Whittlesey's men would be evacuated the following morning.

The Lost Battalion's 694 Americans had suffered 493 killed, wounded, and missing. Hundreds more had been lost trying to rescue them. Whittlesey received the Medal of Honor and a promotion to lieutenant-colonel. Bespectacled and erudite, the shy New Yorker suddenly found himself a national hero. But what the German siege could not accomplish, the Argonne's demons did. While at sea en route to Havana late the night of November 26, 1921, Whittlesey apparently returned to his stateroom, A depiction of Corporal Alvin York and Oberleutnant Paul Vollmer tensely negotiating a surrender on October 8, 1918. York is in the center wielding an M1911 pistol, while Vollmer is to the right, prone and facing him. York is surrounded by the dead and dying Germans who had just charged him. (Painting by Frank Schoonover, public domain)



politely left behind eight sealed, addressed envelopes resolving personal loose ends, and then leapt to his death. His body was never found.

### *Corporal Alvin York, October 8*

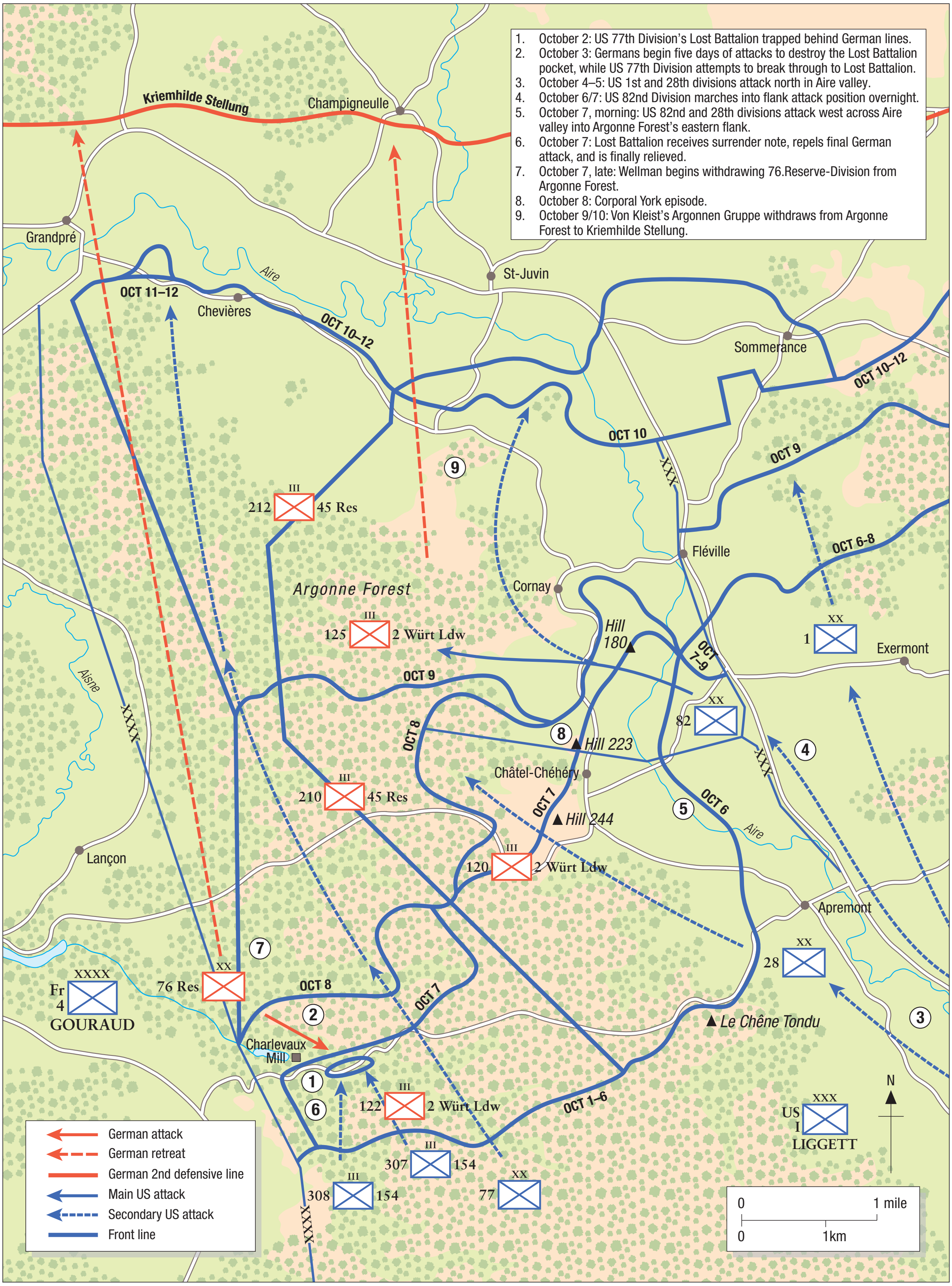
In attempting to relieve the Lost Battalion, the US 82nd Division had resumed attacking the Argonne highland the morning of October 8, but the Americans were heavily resisted by machine-gun nests of the 45.Reserve-Division and Württemberg 2.Landwehr-Division. After a first US wave was virtually annihilated, four noncoms and 13 privates were assembled to take the machine guns out. After German fire again inflicted heavy casualties, command devolved onto the devoutly religious Corporal Alvin York, a conscientious objector from the impoverished eastern Tennessee mountains. Pinned by a Württemberg Landwehr-Regiment Nr. 120 machine-gun nest surrounded by defensive rifle pits, York had his squad take cover while he stealthily worked his way through the forest into an uphill enfilade position.

Settling in, the sharp-shooting Appalachian backwoodsman began methodically picking off German after German with his .30-06 Enfield rifle. "I had no time nohow to do nothing but watch them-there German machine gunners and give them the best I had," the semi-literate York explained that night to his diary. "Every time I seed a German I jes teched him off." After York killed 19 bewildered enemy soldiers, the Germans discovered their tormenter. Knowing York's rifle held only a five-round clip, seven desperate Germans bravely charged York with bayonets from 25 yards. Dropping his Enfield, York drew his Colt .45 M1911 pistol and methodically shot all seven back to front. Finally, the English-speaking Oberleutnant Paul Vollmer, with York pointing his .45 at the prone Vollmer's face, talked York into allowing the remaining Germans to surrender. York agreed. Vollmer blew his whistle, and scores of German troops emerged with their hands up. One lobbed a grenade at York. The grenade missed and York shot his assailant in the head. York put Vollmer in the lead of the German column and jammed the .45 into Vollmer's back, while York's few squadmates guarded them.

En route back to American lines, a German platoon ran into them. Vollmer, with York's .45 buried in his spine, talked these Germans into surrendering also. Resuming its march, the strange column ran into a second German platoon that deployed to attack. Vollmer persuaded

Sergeant Alvin York seen postwar. Decorating York with the Croix de Guerre, Foch told him, "What you did was the greatest thing accomplished by any soldier of all the armies of Europe." Although York's feats were widely celebrated, the Tennessean's sincere modesty, charity, and devoutly Christian faith eventually made him a prime target for more worldly cynics. (National Archives and Records Administration)

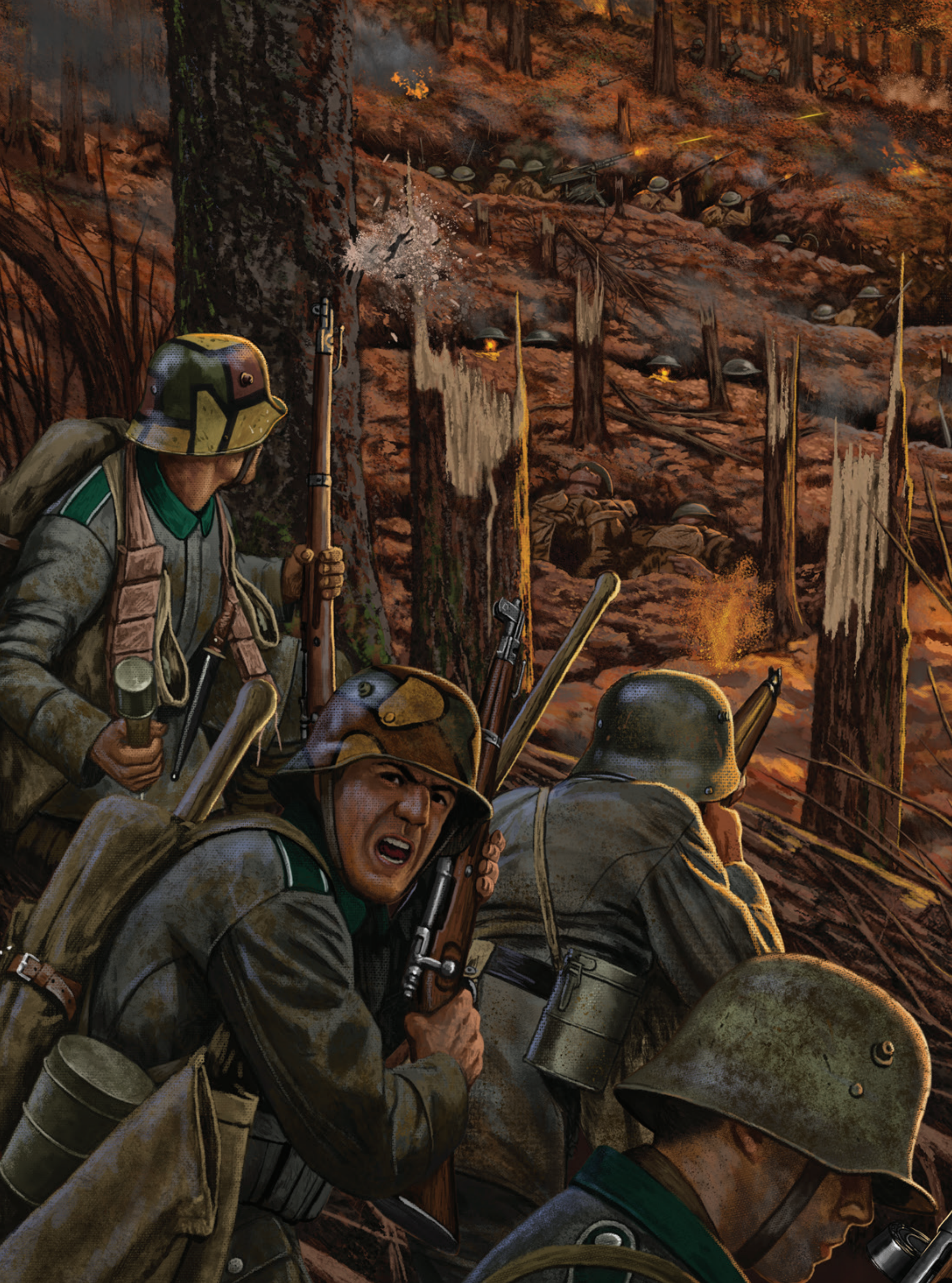
# US I Corps takes the Argonne Forest, October 7–10, 1918

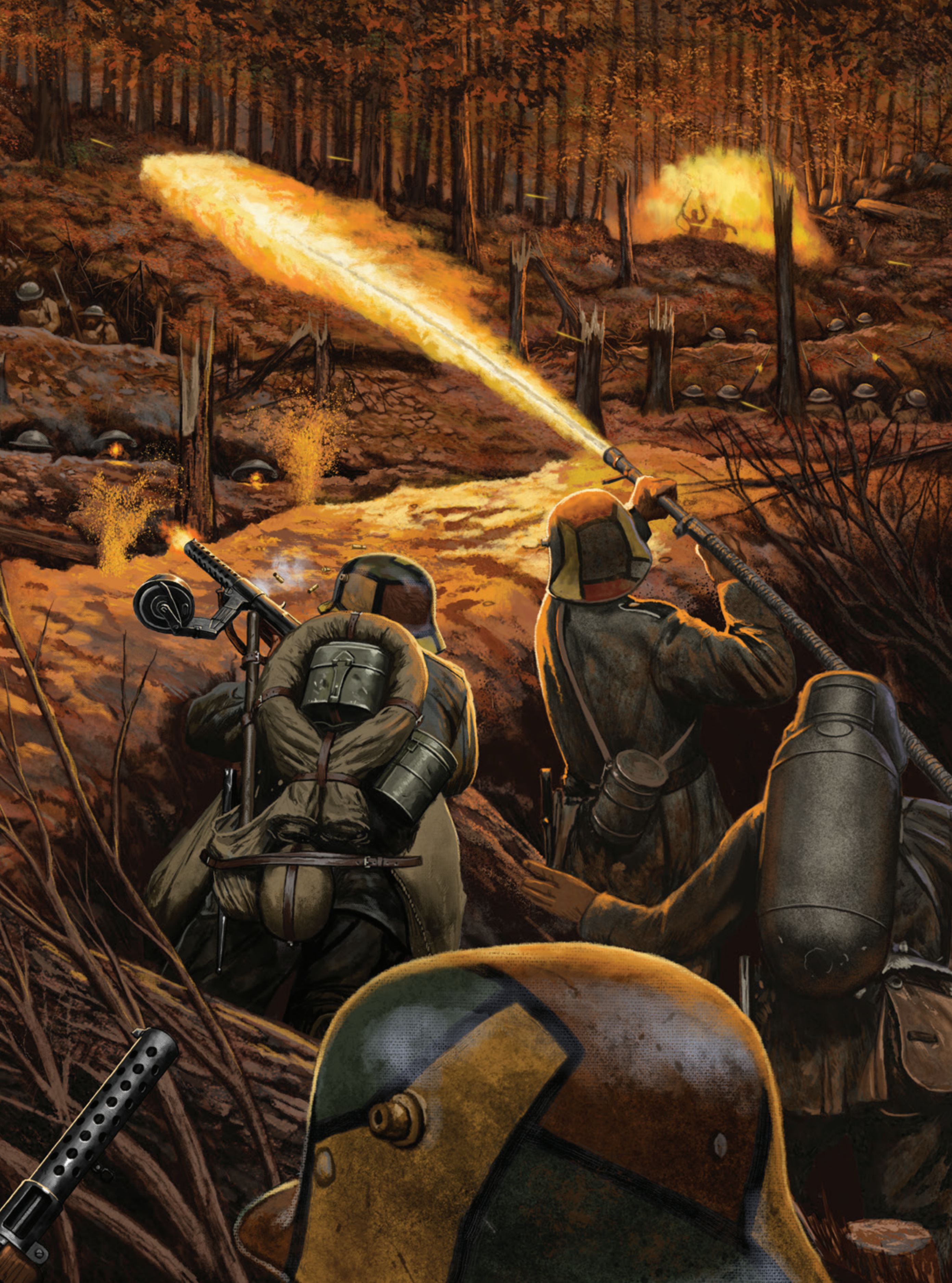


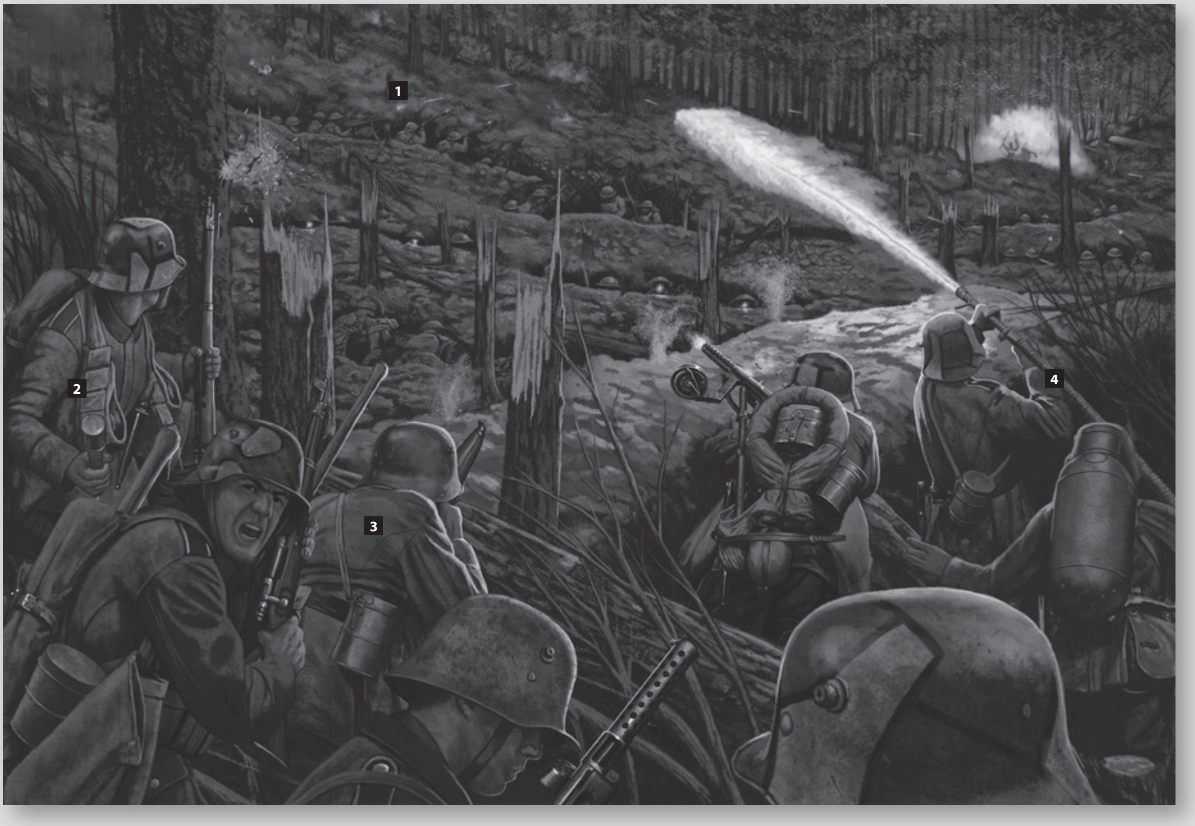
1. October 2: US 77th Division's Lost Battalion trapped behind German lines.
2. October 3: Germans begin five days of attacks to destroy the Lost Battalion pocket, while US 77th Division attempts to break through to Lost Battalion.
3. October 4–5: US 1st and 28th divisions attack north in Aire valley.
4. October 6/7: US 82nd Division marches into flank attack position overnight.
5. October 7, morning: US 82nd and 28th divisions attack west across Aire valley into Argonne Forest's eastern flank.
6. October 7: Lost Battalion receives surrender note, repels final German attack, and is finally relieved.
7. October 7, late: Wellman begins withdrawing 76.Reserve-Division from Argonne Forest.
8. October 8: Corporal York episode.
9. October 9/10: Von Kleist's Argonnen Gruppe withdraws from Argonne Forest to Kriemhilde Stellung.

- German attack
- German retreat
- German 2nd defensive line
- Main US attack
- Secondary US attack
- Front line

Kriemhilde Stellung
Champigneulle
Grandpré
St-Juvin
Aire
OCT 11–12
Chevières
OCT 10–12
Sommerance
OCT 10–12
OCT 10
XXX
OCT 9
9
III
212
45 Res
Fléville
OCT 6-8
Argonne Forest
Cornay
III
125
2 Würt Ldw
Hill 180
OCT 7-9
XX
1
Exermont
OCT 9
Aisne
XXXX
XX
82
OCT 8
8
Hill 223
4
Châtel-Chéhéry
XXX
III
210
45 Res
OCT 7
Hill 244
5
OCT 6
Aire
Lançon
III
120
2 Würt Ldw
Apremont
7
XX
28
XXXX
Fr
4
GOURAUD
XX
76 Res
OCT 8
2
OCT 7
Le Chêne Tondu
3
Charlevaux
Mill
1
6
III
122
2 Würt Ldw
OCT 1–6
N
XXX
US
I
LIGGETT
III
307
154
III
308
154
XX
77
XXXX
0
1 mile
0
1km







**FINAL GERMAN ATTACK ON THE LOST BATTALION, 1700HRS, OCTOBER 7, 1918 (PP. 54–55)**

German regimental intelligence officer Leutnant Heinrich Prinz had lived in Seattle for 12 years before the war and spoke excellent English. Prinz's note requesting the Americans' surrender arrived around 1600hrs, October 7. Although Regiment Nr. 254 was ordered to destroy the American pocket before withdrawing, Prinz knew the war was lost and genuinely wished to save both American and German lives.

Within minutes of receiving Prinz's surrender note, rumors ran rampant through the American pocket: "They want us to quit … the major told them to go to hell." Despite American journalists universally reporting the "go to hell" myth immediately after the battle, Whittlesey and his officers denied that Whittlesey ever said this, or even responded at all. For his part, Whittlesey simply explained, "No response was necessary."

The final German attack began shortly after 1700hrs and came from all sides of the pocket. Just two of the Americans' original nine Hotchkiss machine guns (**1**) were still functional. After days without food and medicine, and with little water and sleep, surviving Americans were weak and in poor health. Nevertheless, according to multiple accounts, once the final German assault began, wounded men rose from their foxholes with their rifles, while those too injured to move loaded rifles for the rest. From behind the American pocket, and uphill, the Germans attacked with potato masher grenades (**2**). The 16 Strosstruppen (**3**) attached that afternoon attacked the Americans' left flank with a handful of flamethrowers (**4**). On the right flank, Captain Nelson Holderman and a sergeant repulsed a German attack almost single-handedly.

The attack lasted at least an hour and a half and virtually exhausted the Americans' last ammunition. Nevertheless, multiple reports claim that "every other emotion of the dead-weary, starving, wounded, hysterical men was transformed into a wild rage, a furious desire for vengeance." Throughout the nearly week-long siege, both sides had engaged in shouted psychological warfare, as many of the besieging Germans spoke English, while many of the encircled Americans spoke German. As the attack failed, the surviving Americans began screaming taunts at the Germans. Minutes later, an American patrol broke through to Whittlesey's pocket, ending the siege.

Major Charles W. Whittlesey, Captain George C. McMurtry, Captain Nelson M. Holderman, Sergeant Benjamin Kaufman, and Private Archie Peck received the Medal of Honor, as did flyers 1st Lieutenant Harold Goettler and 2nd Lieutenant Erwin R. Bleckley of the 50th Aero Squadron, who had given their lives discovering the pocket on October 5.

these Germans into surrendering as well. Unfortunately, one German boy refused to drop his rifle after being ordered twice, and "I had to tech him off," York confessed to his diary. "I hated to do it. I've been doing a tolerable lot of thinking about it since … But I couldn't afford to take any chances and so I let him have it." It was York's 28th and final kill of the day. York and his squadmates had silenced 35 machine guns and captured 132 German prisoners, including three officers. Upon returning to American lines, York's commanding officer cracked, "Well, York, I hear you captured the whole damn German army." York duly received the Medal of Honor and a promotion to sergeant.

An August 2010 view from the area of Chatel-Chéhéry toward the Argonne Forest. The location is not far from where Corporal Alvin York pulled off his October 7 feat, and in fact greatly resembles a 1918 photograph of York marching his German prisoners into captivity. (Photo by Mark A. Wilson, public domain)

### *Liggett's US I Corps takes the Argonne, October 8–11*

The US 82nd Division attacked and captured Cornay on October 8, then lost it to a strong German counterattack which eventually wiped out a surviving pocket of US troops in house-to-house fighting. At 1100hrs the following morning, the 82nd Division recaptured Cornay for good. That same day, the US 1st Division liberated nearby Fléville.

Opposite US I Corps, Gallwitz had permanently withdrawn both Prussian Garde-Infanterie divisions from the Meuse-Argonne on October 8, with the 1.Garde-Infanterie-Division having endured 4,000 casualties and the 5.Garde-Infanterie-Division suffering "heavy losses causing partial disintegration" including its grenadier regiment "practically destroyed."

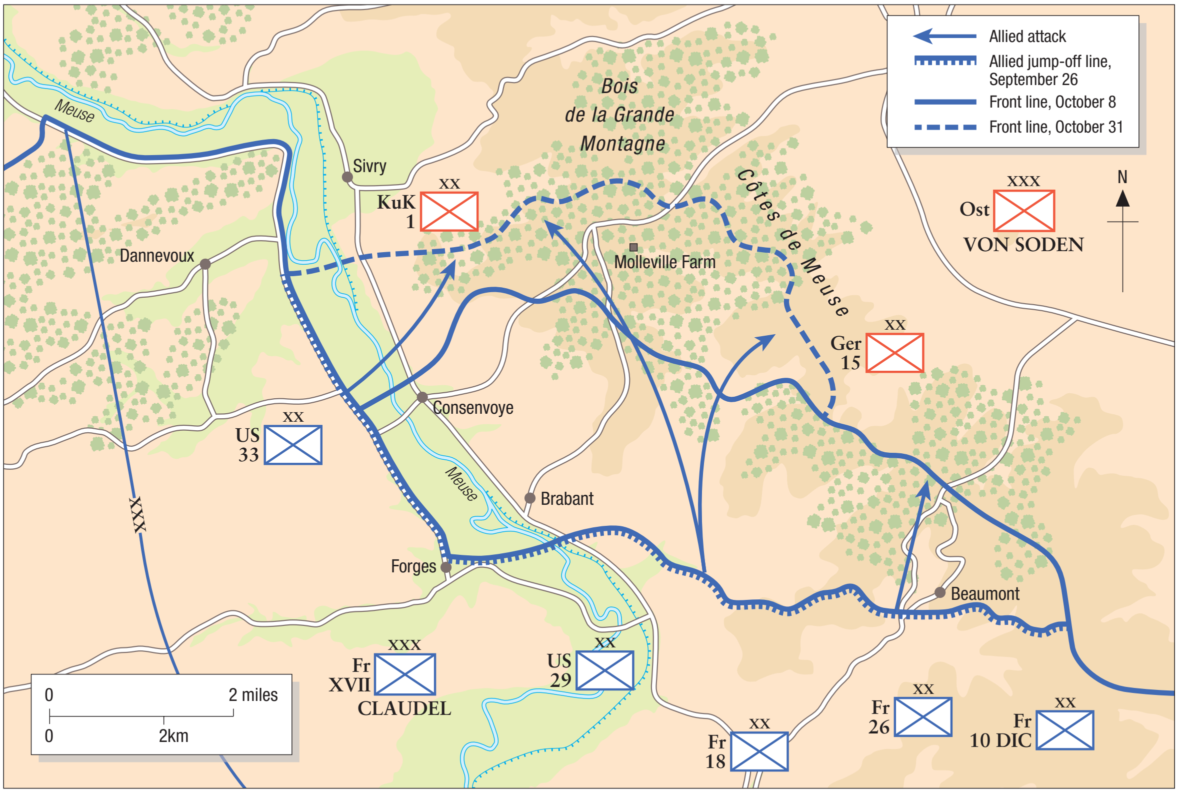
Von Kleist's Argonnen Gruppe withdrew from the eastern Argonne the night of October 9/10 and occupied the heavily fortified Kriemhilde Stellung at Grandpré and St-Juvin to the immediate north. The fighting to win the Argonne Forest had proved extraordinarily costly; during the first week of October, First US Army had suffered 6,589 Americans killed in action. On October 10, Liggett relieved the US 28th Division, and charged his 77th and 82nd divisions with aggressively pursuing the retreating Germans. But German rearguard actions and American exhaustion allowed von Kleist's men to escape.

## STORMING THE CÔTES DE MEUSE, OCTOBER 8

Despite Pershing's plans, French XVII Corps counterbattery fire had failed to suppress Gallwitz's heavy artillery perched on the Meuse's eastern bluffs. Unmolested, the German guns pounded First US Army rear areas unceasingly. Whenever US III and V Corps divisions marshalled to advance, the enfilading German guns switched to bombarding the American assaults creeping up the battlefield. Pershing duly ordered Claudel's French XVII Corps to assault the Côtes de Meuse high ground and physically clear it of German artillery.

Doughboys of the US 1st Division's 18th Infantry stay under cover on the slope of Hill 240, October 11, 1918. One US officer noted, "Some of the men from rural Arkansas and Texas could not read or write but they could shoot. Later replacements from New York and the East could read and write but could not shoot." (PhotoQuest/Getty Images)

## French XVII Corps storms the Côtes de Meuse, October 8–31, 1918


Allied attack
Allied jump-off line, September 26
Front line, October 8
Front line, October 31
N
Meuse
Sivry
Bois de la Grande Montagne
KuK 1
XX
Côtes de Meuse
Molleville Farm
Ost
XXX
VON SODEN
Dannevoux
Ger 15
XX
Consenvoye
US 33
XX
XXX
Meuse
Brabant
Forges
Beaumont
0
2 miles
0
2km
Fr XVII
XXX
CLAUDEL
US 29
XX
Fr 18
XX
Fr 26
XX
Fr 10 DIC
XX

A French artillery crew works their field piece at the Meuse-Argonne. In addition to supplying their own divisions' artillery, much of the Americans' heavy corps and army artillery were also manned by the French. Virtually all artillery was French-built, regardless of personnel. (Hulton Archive/Getty Images)

On October 8, French XVII Corps pounded German positions with heavy gas and "exceedingly violent" artillery, then, at 0500hrs, assaulted the Meuse Heights with the US 33rd and 29th divisions and the French 18e and 26e divisions (making French XVII Corps two-thirds American by manpower). Facing them were the Austrian KuK 1.Infanterie-Division and German 15.Infanterie-Division of General der Infanterie Freiherr Franz von Soden's Maasgruppe Ost.

On the left, the US 33rd Division successfully built and crossed a 156ft-long bridge under heavy shellfire. By 1100hrs, the 33rd Division had taken Brabant across the Meuse before taking Consenvoye at noon. The division then pushed 2 miles northeast toward the Bois de Consenvoye and Bois de Chaume. Already deployed across the Meuse, the center US 29th Division advanced well for 1 mile until encountering and eventually overcoming severe German machine-gun fire to capture the southern Bois de Consenvoye. Then, in a coordinated attack, the US 33rd Division and US 29th Division caught the Austrian KuK 1.Infanterie-Division at Bois de Consenvoye and virtually destroyed it.

On the Americans' right, the French 18e Division liberated Haumont-près-Samogneux and pressed on toward L'Ormont Ferme, while the French 26e Division carefully advanced through the Bois de Caures. The inexperienced Americans complained that the French were lagging behind, but the veteran French were simply much more cautious.

Von Soden inserted his only immediate reserve, a reinforced regiment, but also dispatched three reserve divisions toward the front. Despite capturing 3,000 prisoners, by evening October 8, the XVII Corps attack had reached the steep hills and thick woods of the Meuse Heights and had begun to bog down. Over the next several days, inspired German counterattacks and fierce gas and artillery bombardments met creeping Franco-American gains at La Molleville Ferme, the Bois de Consenvoye, Bois de Chaume, and the Bois de la Grande Montagne. By October 16, the French XVII Corps attack on the Meuse's eastern bank had ground to a halt without clearing the heights or reaching Sivry-sur-Meuse. The stalled Franco-American attack nevertheless significantly diverted German artillery fire and sapped fading German reserves.

## ATTACKING THE CENTRAL HEIGHTS, OCTOBER 4–12

By October 4, most of First US Army east of the Argonne faced the outer Hindenburg Line. Pershing's main objective was to break the Hindenburg Line in the battlefield's whaleback center, dominated by the wooded Romagne and Cunel heights. At dawn, October 4, Pershing's resumed American offensive "launched with great force." Nine Saint-Chamond tanks supported III Corps, while the 15e Brigade de Cavalerie Légère (BCL) supported the 3rd Division and the 17e BCL supported the 32nd Division.

Southeast of Cunel, the US 4th Division captured the Bois de Fays. To 4th Division's left, Major-General Adelbert Cronkhite's US 80th Division twice attacked the Bois des Ogons on October 4, and was repulsed. Cronkhite tried to refuse a third attack. Bullard flatly told him: "Give it up and you are a goner. You'll lose your command in 24 hours. Make one more attack. This time you'll take the wood and throw the enemy out." The following morning, October 5, Cronkhite exhorted, "The reputation of the Division is at stake! The Bois des Ogons must be taken!" German defenders repeatedly mauled 80th Division's day-long, piecemeal attacks into the woods before stealthily evacuating. At 1800hrs, Cronkhite ordered the entire 80th Division into the now-empty Bois des Ogons, securing it that evening. Three miles west, the 32nd Division occupied Gesnes.

American combat engineers cut through the typical wren's nest of German barbed wire on the Meuse-Argonne. At St-Mihiel, the Germans had neglected to maintain their entanglements, and much of their barbed wire was rusted and easily broken. Unfortunately, the Meuse-Argonne's wire proved much better maintained. (Hulton-Deutsch Collection/Corbis via Getty Images)

### *Private John Lewis Barkley, October 7*

On the rainy afternoon of October 7, the US 3rd Division's Private John Lewis Barkley, scouting alone deep in no-man's-land, observed a German counterattack marshalling at the edge of the Bois de Cunel woods near Madeleine Ferme. Barkley repaired an abandoned German MG 08/15 light machine gun and scrounged up 4,000 rounds of ammunition. Covered by a coincidental smoke barrage, Barkley set up inside a Renault tank disabled in an open field. As the first German column marched past him, Barkley waited until they were at point-blank range, took a deep breath, and opened fire.

Over the next hour, Barkley nursed his increasingly overheating machine gun as he methodically mowed German infantry down. Finally discovering his position, desperate German troops mounted a human wave charge against him that Barkley repulsed. Minutes later, a point-blank German 77mm artillery barrage scored a direct hit against the immobilized tank, knocking Barkley unconscious. Upon waking up, the dazed American resumed his one-man massacre, beginning with the crew of the 77mm howitzer that had hit him earlier. Having neutralized the howitzer, Barkley then shredded a second German charge against him, ignoring the bullets and grenades bouncing off his Renault. Inevitably, Barkley's smoking, overheating machine gun began finally to die, boiling off all its water and even some oil Barkley had poured into the water jacket. Barkley knew his luck was running out: "I just sat there, with my head in my hands, waiting. I told myself I was waiting for the gun to cool off. But it was really the end I was waiting for." Suddenly, Barkley's surrounding Germans were hammered by American artillery and machine-gun fire from nearby Hill 253. Filthy, battered, and exhausted, Barkley staggered out of the tank, where an advancing US patrol intercepted him. Glancing behind him as he evacuated to American lines, Barkley observed German artillery obliterate his late Renault. The stuttering, slightly built Missourian would receive the Medal of Honor for his efforts. He had killed hundreds of German infantry and single-handedly wrecked the planned German counterthrust against 3rd Division.

### *The offensive resumes, October 9–12*

With German artillery fire from the Côtes de Meuse greatly reduced by French XVII Corps' attack, Cameron's US V Corps vigorously resumed its offensive on October 9. Its 3rd and 80th divisions penetrated the Kriemhilde Stellung at the Bois de Cunel, while the 32nd Division pierced it south of Romagne. Two days later, Hines' 4th Division gained a foothold in the Bois de Forêt. Yet, once more, all across the line Pershing's offensive began grinding to a halt in front of the fearsome Kriemhilde Stellung. Pershing resumed rotating his battered divisions on October 11. Worst hit was the 1st Division; the "Big Red One" had lost 9,387 officers and men since October 1, the most of any one division during the campaign. Relieving them was the veteran 42nd "Rainbow" Division.

Heavily decorated Samuel Woodfill poses while wearing his Medal of Honor on April 14, 1921. He has been discharged from his wartime officer rank of captain and now wears the stripes of a master sergeant. Woodfill was one of several Meuse-Argonne heroes invited to be a pall bearer for the entombing of the American Unknown Soldier in late 1921. (Public domain)

### *1st Lieutenant Samuel Woodfill, October 12*

After a week of brutal fighting, the resumed American offensive had begun to culminate by October 12. Meanwhile, that morning, US 5th Division's 1st Lieutenant Samuel Woodfill was leading his company toward Cunel when it was stalled by a German machine-gun nest. Woodfill took two men with him and advanced through the fog into no-man's-land. Leaving the other two Americans in front, Woodfill worked his way around the machine-gun nest's flank. Within 10 yards, four Germans emerged. Woodfill shot the first three with his pistol, before the fourth, an officer, rushed Woodfill and attempted to club him with his rifle. A hand-to-hand struggle ensued before Woodfill shot the German officer as well. Woodfill then continued to lead his company forward, before encountering a second machine-gun nest. Woodfill charged directly into the heavy enemy machine-gun fire and shot several more Germans, captured an additional three, and silenced the second nest. Within minutes, as mustard gas and artillery shells exploded all around him, Woodfill charged a third machine-gun nest, shot five Germans with his rifle, and drew his revolver on two Germans in the trench just yards away. His revolver jamming, Woodfill leapt into the trench on top of the Germans, snatched away their handy pickax, and slew both Germans with it. Woodfill had silenced his third machine-gun nest of the morning. He and his company had penetrated the Hindenburg Line. Woodfill duly dispatched a messenger with a report and request for reinforcements, which were denied—the American offensive was fading, meaning Woodfill's company had advanced "too far out front." For his trouble, Woodfill received the Medal of Honor, but he and his men were forced to evacuate their hard-won gains.

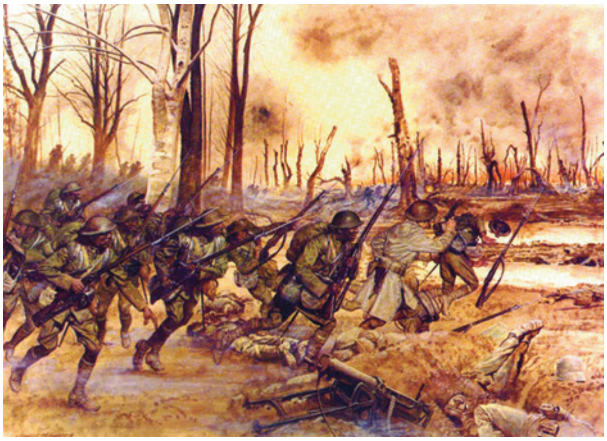
## AMERICAN ACTIONS IN CHAMPAGNE, SEPTEMBER 26–OCTOBER 12

Immediately west of First US Army, in Champagne, was Gouraud's French 4e Armée, comprising 34 total divisions, 2,766 guns (1,326 heavy), 51 Schneider medium tanks, 225 Renault light tanks, plus another 90 Renaults and 234 Saint-Chamond medium tanks in reserve. Gouraud's 4e Armée infantry assault had begun at 0525hrs, September 26, five minutes before Pershing's. Although less imposing than the Meuse-Argonne, the hilly, chalky Champagne ground ahead of 4e Armée was still quite difficult, and its German fortifications were better manned and established.

### *US black troops with French 4e Armée, September 26–30*

Advancing along the Aisne Valley and the western Argonne Forest was French XXXVIII Corps. To maintain contact with First US Army on XXXVIII Corps' right, a mixed Franco-American liaison formation was formed. Called Groupement Durand, it comprised the US 368th Infantry Regiment of the all-black US 92nd Division (then currently in US I Corps reserve) and the French 11e Cuirassiers-à-Pied regiment from the 1er Division de Cavalerie à Pied (DCP, or dismounted cavalry division). This far-right wing of 4e Armée faced von Einem's German 9.Landwehr-Division and 4.Bayerische-Division.

Groupement Durand attacked at 0525hrs on September 26. Its mission was to probe German lines, maintain contact with flanking units, and aggressively pursue any potential German retirement. Some considerable ground was initially gained, but by evening, the 368th Infantry had retired nearly 1 mile back behind its own start line. On September 27, against relatively light German opposition, the full brigade advanced just 1 mile. The 368th Infantry was then reinforced with two 92nd Division machine-gun companies, additional French artillery, and a squadron of the French 10e Régiment de Dragons (dragoons). The afternoon of September 28, heavy German shellfire bombarded the US 368th Regiment as it



The Harlem Hellfighters seen attacking at Séchault in Champagne. The US Army unfortunately ignored the 93rd Division regiments' conspicuous battlefield success. By instead focusing on the failure of the 92nd Division, US Army leadership justified further diminishing the role of black Americans in the military during the 1920s and 1930s. (Painting by Hugh Charles McBarron Jr., public domain) advanced toward Binarville. Two 368th battalions virtually disintegrated. The following day, September 29, Pershing placed the 92nd Division's entire 184th Infantry Brigade at the disposal of French XXXVIII Corps.

The French 9e Cuirassiers-à-Pied attacked Binarville the afternoon of September 30. On their left, a battalion of the US 368th Infantry joined the attack without orders, and helped capture the town at 1600hrs. German artillery then forced two US companies 300 yards back into former German trenches. On October 1, the disappointing US 368th Infantry was transferred to the reserve, and by October 4, all US 92nd Division units had been returned to Pershing's control. Total US 368th Infantry casualties were 270.

Units of the all-black US 93rd Division performed considerably better. Its 369th, 371st, and 372nd Infantry regiments were assigned to Gouraud's French IX Corps. On September 26, the corps' reserve US 369th Infantry (the "Harlem Hellfighters") rushed in to plug a widening gap in the French assault. The 369th then pushed north through heavy German machine-gun fire to cross the Dormoise River, eventually taking the village of Ripont by dusk. The next two days, the 369th helped clear the eastern Bellevue ridge in grueling fighting through fog, poison gas, and German machine-gun nests. On September 28, the US 371st and 372nd Infantry regiments assaulted the central Bellevue ridge.

The following morning, the 369th reached open ground and advanced 1½ miles, taking the village of Séchault that afternoon. Simultaneously, the 371st and 372nd Infantry continued spearheading the 157e Division's assault north, taking Ardeuil-et-Montfauxelles, while eliminating German machine-gun nests and snipers holed up in destroyed villages. After more hard fighting, all but one 93rd Division battalion was transferred into reserve by late September 30.

The French 125e Division relieved the 157e Division on October 6/7, and the US 369th, 371st, and 372nd Infantry regiments transferred to the quiet Vosges Mountains for the war's duration. They had advanced over 5 miles and suffered 2,502 casualties, including 418 killed. Their French commanders widely praised their battlefield performance.

## *Blanc Mont Ridge, October 3–12*

After Foch had requested American reinforcements in Champagne, Pershing had offered Major-General John A. Lejeune (USMC)'s veteran US 2nd Division and Major-General William Ruthven Smith's barely trained US 36th Division. Lejeune's 2nd Division arrived in the French 4e Armée sector on September 28. Fearing Gouraud meant to break them up, Lejeune promised to capture the wooded, heavily fortified Blanc Mont massif—Champagne's critical high point commanding the front between the Argonne and Reims. The French agreed. Lejeune prepared a methodical, set-piece assault against Blanc Mont. The massif was primarily defended by the 200.Infanterie-Division and 213.Infanterie-Division.

At 0550hrs, October 3, Lejeune's US 2nd Division attacked Blanc Mont after a vicious five-minute pounding by 48 French artillery batteries. The French 167e Division and 21e

US Marines attacking German positions during the Meuse-Argonne campaign. Marines comprised about half of the US 2nd Division's infantry, an elite but token fraction of the AEF. Although ostensibly a joint force that included marines and sailors, the ground-based AEF was overwhelmingly a US Army force. (National Archives and Records Administration)

Division covered the Americans' left and right flanks respectively. The US 2nd Division assaulted "over the desolated white chalky ground of the Champagne, which was scarred and shell pocked by years of artillery fire, marked with huge mine craters, gridironed with an intricate maze of deep trenches and concrete fortifications, and covered with tangled masses of wire." By 0830hrs, the Americans had conquered the strongly entrenched German positions between Blanc Mont and Medeah Ferme. Over the next two days, the Americans methodically drove toward the village of St-Étienne. Flanking French units had not kept up, and US 2nd Division found itself exposed and forced to repulse violent German counterattacks. The Americans then successfully drove into St-Étienne on October 4, having advanced a total of 4 miles.

On October 6/7, the inexperienced US 36th Division was ordered forward to relieve the 2nd Division. By now, Gouraud's French 4e Armée had lost its offensive momentum; from September 26 through October 5, 4e Armée had suffered 33,725 casualties. Smith's US 36th Division fully relieved Lejeune's US 2nd Division by October 10. The 2nd Division had suffered 4,975 casualties, but had captured 2,296 prisoners and a large quantity of materiel. By then, French XXXVIII Corps had reached the south banks of the Aisne and Aire rivers. Having advanced 13 miles, the US 36th Division reached the Aisne on October 12, which von Einem's retreating 3.Armee had already crossed. According to Ludendorff, "Only in consequence of the American advance in the Argonne and to the east … [was] 3.Armee obliged to withdraw behind the Aisne and the Aire during the nights of October 9–12."

## PERSHING REORGANIZES THE AEF, OCTOBER 12

Since September 26, First US Army had suffered over 12,600 Americans killed, for little gain. As the Meuse-Argonne lurched fitfully into expensive stalemate, Pershing's dream of an independent American offensive appeared to be unfolding into a mortifying disaster. At one point, while being driven to the front, the impassive Pershing was observed breaking down, burying his head in his hands, and calling on his late wife: "Frankie … Frankie … my God sometimes I don't know how I can go on."

Pershing's responsibilities were enormous. By October 10, First US Army—the war's largest single field army—held 80 total miles of front and numbered 1 million men (900,000 Americans and 100,000 French). Back at St-Mihiel, Pershing duly activated the Second US Army with its headquarters at Toul, promoting III Corps' Major-General Robert Bullard to lieutenant-general and Second Army command, effective October 12. Subordinated within Second Army were the US VI Corps, US IV Corps, and French II Corps d'Armée Colonial. For now, Second Army would undertake only small local actions while it grew in strength. Supporting Bullard was Colonel Frank P. Lahm's newly established Second Army Air Service. Mitchell, still commanding the full American air force, was promoted to brigadier-general.

Pershing retained overall AEF command, but relinquished First US Army to I Corps' Hunter Liggett, whom Pershing also promoted to lieutenant-general. It does Pershing no discredit to observe that replacing himself with Liggett was his single best decision of the Meuse-Argonne campaign. While

A US signalman on a field telephone during the Meuse-Argonne campaign. It was the Meuse-Argonne that saw the very first American Indian "codetalkers." These were Choctaw Indians of the US 36th Division's Oklahoma National Guard, whose Choctaw dialect proved impossible for the Germans to crack during the war. (Bettmann via Getty Images)

Pershing's grasp of modern battlefield tactics was doubtful, Liggett's was masterful.

Pershing had relieved US V Corps' Major-General George Cameron on October 11, rendering all three US corps commands vacant. To lead the left-hand I Corps, Pershing transferred in Major-General Joseph T. Dickman from St-Mihiel's IV Corps. To command the center V Corps, Pershing promoted 1st Division's Major-General Charles Summerall. On the right, Pershing elevated 4th Division's Major-General John L. Hines to lead III Corps. The fired Cameron then temporarily reverted to 4th Division before being sent home on October 22.

Despite his brief, uncharacteristic breakdown, Pershing was by nature optimistic to a fault. He read every report and toured the front far more frequently than most four-star generals. While visiting the 90th Division, Pershing told General Henry T. Allen: "Things are going badly … but by God! Allen, I was never so much in earnest in my life. We are going to get through!"

## BREAKING THE KRIEMHILDE STELLUNG, OCTOBER 14–16

By October 14, eight US divisions were in the line facing 13 much smaller German divisions. On the left, US I Corps hammered away at the Kriemhilde Stellung north of the Argonne. Alexander's US 77th Division took the fortified village of St-Juvin on October 14, while the 82nd Division would secure important high ground outside St-Juvin between October 14 and 16. The US 78th "Lightning" Division relieved Alexander's 77th Division on October 16. The New Yorkers had advanced 11 miles through the Argonne since D-Day, suffering 4,061 casualties.

Pershing's primary goal was to penetrate the Hindenburg Line between St-Georges and the Romagne Heights. By taking the Kriemhilde Stellung's commanding heights in the battlefield's center, Pershing and Liggett expected to unhinge the rest of the Hindenburg Line. The Americans' principal objective was the Côte Dame Marie, a crescent-shaped ridge 1 mile west of the village of Romagne and 5 miles north of Montfaucon. At 945ft ASL, Côte Dame Marie loomed 285ft above the surrounding valleys.

The assault plan first expected the US 32nd Division to attack in the center, fixing the Côte Dame Marie's German defenders. Three hours later, US V Corps' veteran 42nd "Rainbow" Division and US III Corps' 5th Division would strike in a double envelopment from the left and right respectively. The initial date for the assault was to be October 15. However, Gouraud requested Pershing advance the operation to coincide with Gouraud's own attack date of October 14.

### *US 5th Division attacks toward Bantheville, October 14–16*

Major-General John McMahon's US 5th Division endured a two-hour pounding from German artillery before it even began its uphill attack between Romagne-sous-Montfaucon and the Bois de Rappes early on October 14.

After taking several hills, they took a final treeless ridge and could go no further. Brutally exposed to a crossfire of German machine guns, the assault waves attempted to take cover for the night.

The 5th Division's 9th Brigade, reduced to a mere 1,100 men, attacked the following morning, October 15. Advancing through relentless machine-gun fire, they pushed uphill through the northern Bois de Pultière, then penetrated a short open space before crashing directly into the dense Bois de Rappes, capturing most of it at heavy price before digging in. But late that evening, a dubious report reached McMahon that his 9th Brigade had been swept by panic and was fleeing. McMahon uncritically assumed the rumor was true, and ordered 5th Division to abandon October 15's hard-won gains and withdraw in the early dark of October 16. McMahon eventually realized his mistake, but it was too late. Still 1 mile short of Bantheville, and down to 25 percent rifle strength, 5th Division would struggle the next four days to retake the same ground, suffering hundreds of casualties.

### *Lenihan's US 83rd Brigade (42nd Division) attacks St-Georges and Landres-et-St-Georges, October 14–15*

Pershing tasked Major-General Charles Menoher's US 42nd "Rainbow" Division with cracking the heavily fortified left of the central Kriemhilde Stellung. Menoher ordered his left-hand 83rd Brigade, under Brigadier-General Michael J. Lenihan, to take the fortified villages of St-Georges and Landres-et-St-Georges, while Brigadier-General Douglas MacArthur's right-hand 84th Brigade was tasked with taking Hill 288 and the Côte de Châtillon high points. Both 42nd Division brigades would attack on October 14.

Merely reaching St-Georges and Landres-et-St-Georges required Lenihan's 83rd Brigade to traverse 1 mile of open field slashed by three barbed-wire belts, each backed by its own machine-gun trench. US officers chose not to support the attack with gas. Only ten functional Renault light tanks were available to support the 83rd Brigade's advance. Under the circumstances, a successful attack was virtually impossible, and slaughter of Lenihan's assault infantry likely. But neither Summerall nor Menoher offered any alternatives or solutions, nor did Lenihan apparently seek any, or protest his orders.

Taking heavy casualties and worn down by German gas, 83rd Brigade reached the first German trench line only to find chest-high barbed-

American infantry under gas attack going over the top at the Meuse-Argonne. The lead doughboy is without a gas mask and appears to be choking. While gas caused serious casualties, its main tactical use was to cause fatigue and disrupt morale, as the gas masks were uncomfortable and easily fogged up in the Meuse-Argonne's humid conditions. (Bettmann via Getty Images)

The Côte de Châtillon seen in July 2018. Its wooded approaches are apparent, although 100 years earlier, its heights had probably been denuded by Franco-American artillery. The commander of its conquering US 84th Brigade, Douglas MacArthur, would eventually succeed Pershing, Hines, and Summerall as US Army Chief of Staff. (Photo by Capt. William Carraway, US Department of Defense, public domain)

wire entanglements 20ft deep. With no alternatives available, the only option was a frontal assault. The skilled Germans, however, had assembled their barbed-wire entanglements loosely, so that US artillery was unable to blow holes through them (the whole tangle simply jumped up in the air and fell back down intact). Teams of 83rd Brigade engineers bravely commenced cutting through the chest-high wire. German machine gunners methodically mowed them down, leaving countless engineer corpses hanging in the wire they had tried to breach. Historian Edward Lengel summarized: "It was a 1914-style attack with 1914-style results: a massacre." The following day, October 15, Lenihan's US 83rd Brigade attacked again, and was again repulsed. Menoher then stood aside while Summerall fired Lenihan and replaced him with Colonel Henry Reilly of the 149th Field Artillery.

### *MacArthur's US 84th Brigade (42nd Division) takes Hill 288 and the Côte de Châtillon, October 14–16*

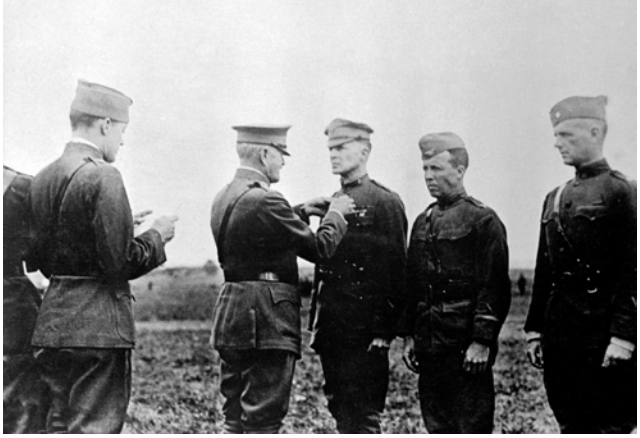
The US 42nd Division's 84th Brigade, commanded by Brigadier-General Douglas MacArthur, was ordered to take the Kriemhilde Stellung's Hill 288 and the Côte de Châtillon high point. Defending the Côte de Châtillon were parts of the Prussian 41.Infanterie-Division, which had impregnated the steep ridge's crest and slopes with nearly 200 machine guns. Fronting these were the usual German barbed-wire entanglements. But unlike Lenihan's open valley, MacArthur's approach was largely covered by forest.

Summerall visited MacArthur's 84th Brigade headquarters the night of October 13. According to MacArthur, Summerall told him: "Give me Châtillon, or a list of five thousand casualties." MacArthur allegedly responded, "If this brigade does not capture Châtillon you can publish a casualty list of the entire brigade with the brigade commander's name at the top." Privately, MacArthur had admitted to Menoher he was not certain he could take it.

With MacArthur personally leading from the front, the US 84th Brigade took Hill 288 on October 14–15, but failed to capture the Côte de Châtillon. MacArthur was later discovered with a bullet hole through his sleeve. "When did brigadier generals get to be expendable?" raved a starstruck American journalist. "Well," MacArthur responded, "there are times when even general officers have to be expendable."

Late on October 15, MacArthur dreamed up a nighttime bayonet assault up the Côte de Châtillon. MacArthur's own officers found the idea appallingly suicidal; they desperately talked their way out of it, likely saving MacArthur's career. Captain Ravee Norris instead proposed a pincer attack on the Côte de Châtillon, infiltrating

General John J. Pershing personally decorates Brigadier-General Douglas MacArthur with the Distinguished Service Cross. Just before the Armistice, MacArthur was promoted to 42nd Division command, the youngest American divisional commander of the war at 38. (Bettmann via Getty Images)



via a ravine discovered in an aerial photograph. MacArthur personally led a reconnaissance of this gap in the early dark of October 16. After enduring a German artillery barrage, MacArthur suddenly found himself the party's lone survivor. Thoroughly shaken, MacArthur made his way back to American lines, explaining, "God led me by the hand the way he led Joshua."

Hours later, at 1000hrs, October 16, an artillery barrage opened the American attack. Sixty American machine guns kept German heads down for 45 minutes while the Alabaman 167th Infantry Regiment stormed uphill from the left, and the Iowan 168th Infantry charged uphill from the right. Unaware German machine gunners, expecting the usual American frontal assault, were taken from the rear by the giddy doughboys. German counterattacks against the summit were repelled, and by nightfall, the Côte de Châtillon was unquestionably in American hands. The new 83rd Brigade commander, Colonel Reilly, realized, "The capture of the Côte de Châtillon also meant that instead of the Germans looking down into the American position the Americans now looked down into German lines. Thus, the American artillery observers were able to make the whole valley … which formerly had been hidden entirely from them, unsafe for the Germans." MacArthur, the ultimate self-promoter, had won yet another laurel to add to his relentlessly growing résumé.

The US 42nd Division had suffered 2,895 casualties attacking the Kriemhilde Stellung. Among them was future OSS chief Lieutenant-Colonel William "Wild Bill" Donovan, who led an October 15 attack toward Landres-et-St-Georges. Donovan was shot in the leg by a machine gun, but refused to be evacuated, eventually receiving the Medal of Honor.

The US 32nd Division's 64th Infantry Brigade creeps up a reverse slope on the Romagne Heights, October 18, 1918. The dangerously wide-open heights were easily swept by German machine-gun fire. The American conquest of the battlefield's central heights signaled the turning point of the Meuse-Argonne campaign. (US Army Signal Corps, public domain)

### *Haan's US 32nd Division conquers the Côte Dame Marie and Romagne Heights, October 14–16*

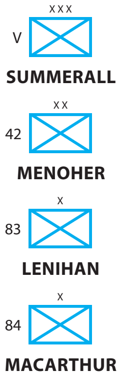
On October 13, Major-General William G. Haan's US 32nd Division had unsuccessfully attacked the Côte Dame Marie. During the attack, an erroneous report that his division had captured Côte Dame Marie reached Haan, who forwarded it to V Corps. Summerall in turn forwarded the message to Pershing. Too late, a mortified Haan suddenly realized the Côte Dame Marie had not been taken after all. Mistakenly believing Pershing's planned October 14 attack was on him, Haan determined that the 32nd Division would do more than feint; it would take the high point Haan had accidentally claimed captured the day before.

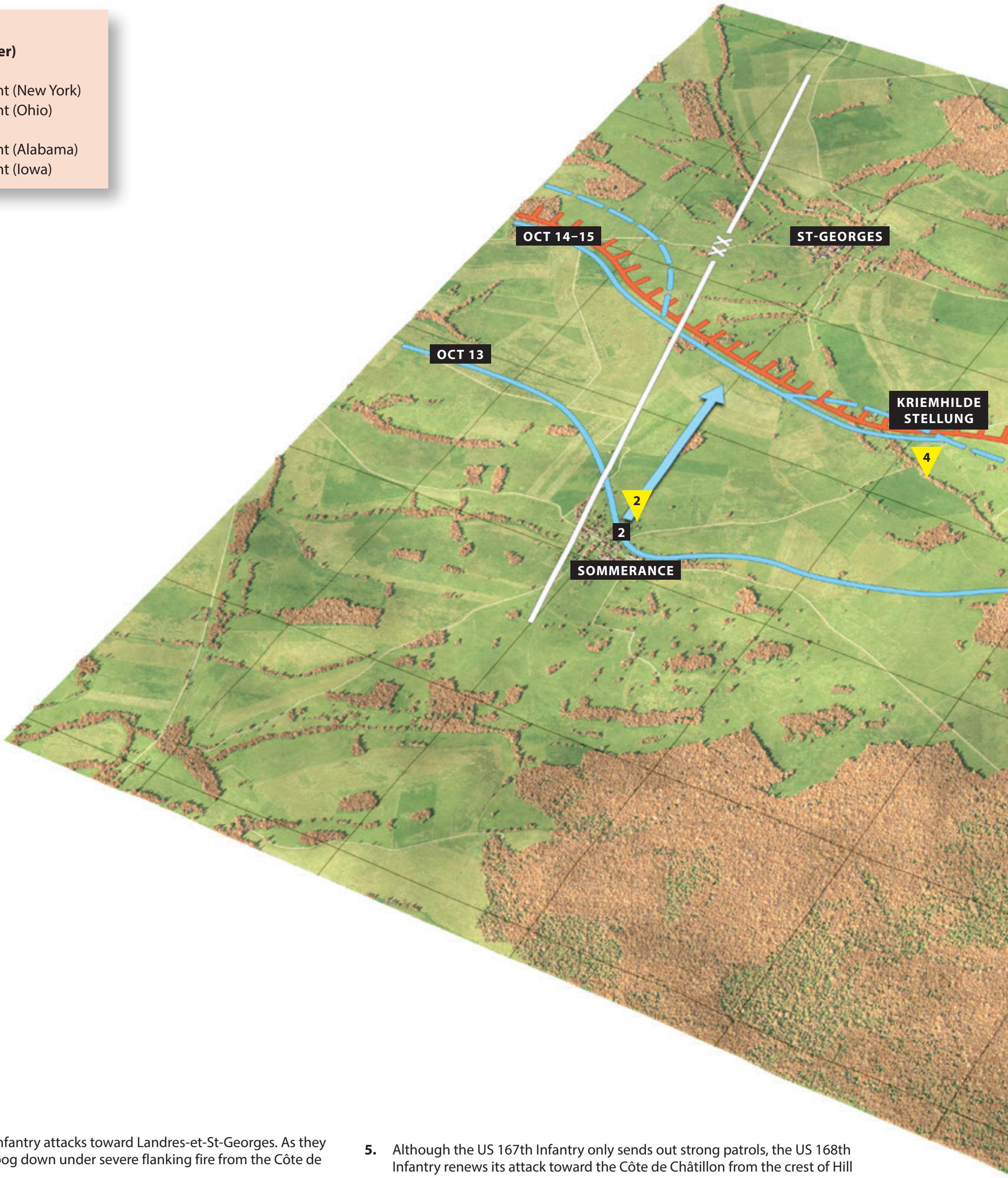
The US 126th Infantry's 3rd Battalion inadvertently produced the decisive development. Finding his troops pinned by German machine guns uphill, the battalion's commander ordered Captain Edward B. Strom to take them out. Strom took seven men and clambered up the Côte Dame Marie's eastern hillside. What followed has been described as "an act of desperation which succeeded

A view of the Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery at Romagne in 1927. The view is now different, with a chapel in the background, reflecting pool in the foreground, and well-manicured trees and hedges throughout the site. While the majority of the 14,000-plus gravestones are from the Meuse-Argonne, some are from other battles and theaters, while over 400 represent unknown soldiers. (Underwood Archives/Getty Images)

**AMERICAN**
**US 42nd Division (Menoher)**
83rd Brigade (Lenihan)
1. 165th Infantry Regiment (New York)
2. 166th Infantry Regiment (Ohio)

84th Brigade (MacArthur)
3. 167th Infantry Regiment (Alabama)
4. 168th Infantry Regiment (Iowa)





## EVENTS

**October 14**

1. At 0830hrs, the US 165th Infantry attacks toward Landres-et-St-Georges. As they advance, they eventually bog down under severe flanking fire from the Côte de Châtillon.
2. The US 166th Infantry also attacks at 0830hrs, with their objective the village of St-Georges. They advance about half a mile before heavy German fire and mustard gas stops them.
3. Major Lloyd Ross' 1st Battalion of the 168th Infantry attacks toward the Côte de Châtillon, eventually reaching the crest of Hill 288 against heavy German machine-gun fire at midday, with MacArthur personally leading from the front. The battalion digs in, having taken 65 percent casualties. By evening, German artillery from the Côte de Meuse forces the 84th Brigade to dig in on the southern slope of Hill 288.

**October 15**

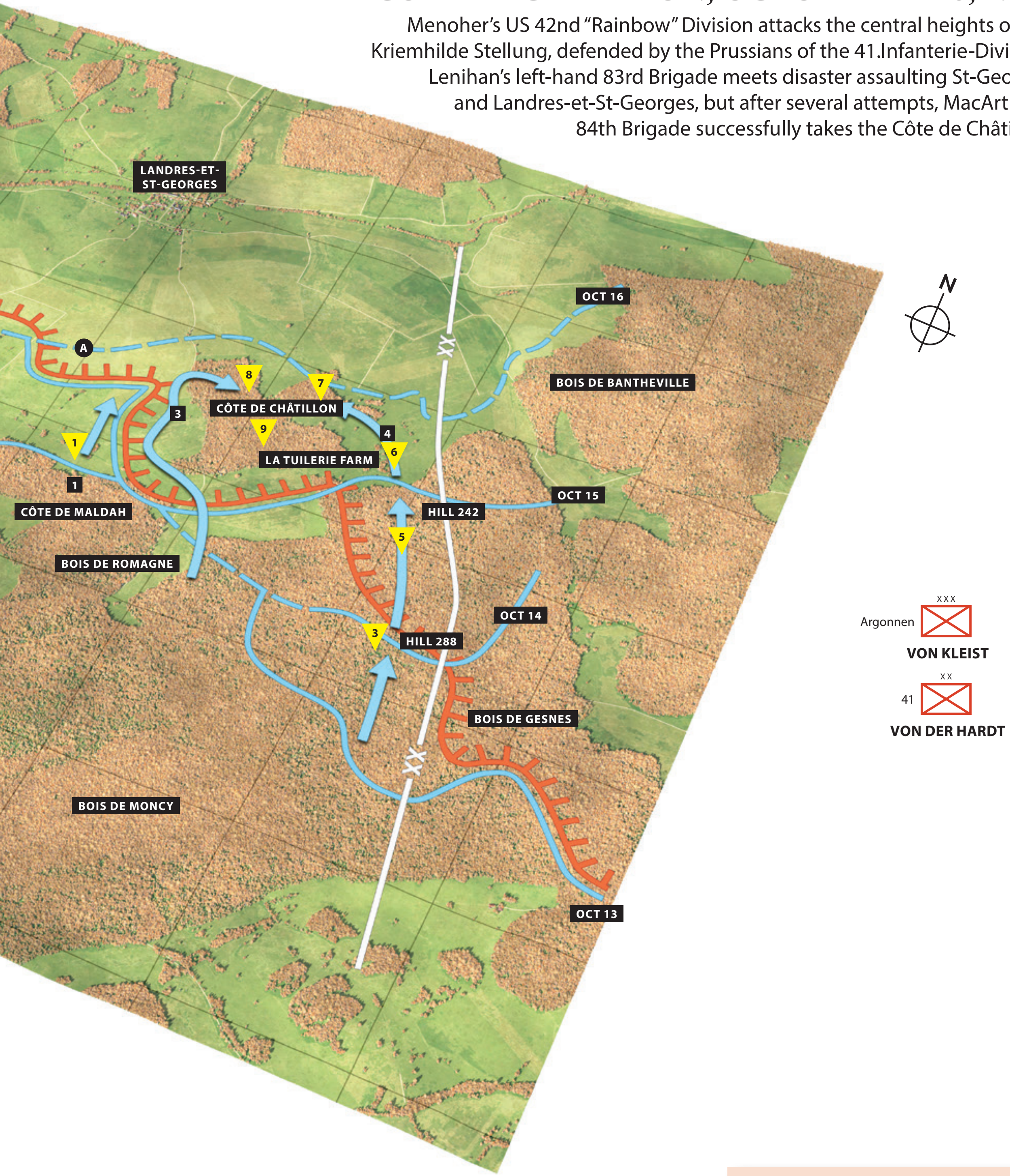
4. At 0730hrs, the US 165th and 166th Infantry advance toward Landres-et-St-Georges and St-Georges, attacking through 1 mile of open field that includes three belts of barbed-wire entanglements, each backed by machine-gun trenches. Ten Renault tanks attempt to support them. The attacks end in disaster for both US regiments. Going over Menoher's head, US V Corps commander Summerall fires 83rd Brigade commander Brigadier-General Lenihan later that evening.
5. Although the US 167th Infantry only sends out strong patrols, the US 168th Infantry renews its attack toward the Côte de Châtillon from the crest of Hill 288. After advancing half a mile, they secure Hill 242 and La Tuilerie Farm in a confused action through German gas. An attack against the Côte de Châtillon stalls on the steep slope of the ridge. The 168th Infantry is forced to fall back, and at nightfall digs in halfway between Hill 288 and the Côte de Châtillon.

**October 16**

6. In the early dark of October 16, MacArthur leads a personal nighttime reconnaissance of a gap discovered in aerial photos. After he and his party are shelled by German artillery, MacArthur is the only survivor.
7. At 1000hrs, a 45-minute bombardment by 60 US machine guns commences the Côte de Châtillon assault. At 1045hrs, the US 168th Infantry charges up the right side of the Côte de Châtillon and eventually reaches the summit.
8. Simultaneously, Lieutenant-Colonel Walter E. Bare's US 167th Infantry attacks up the left side of the Côte de Châtillon, and reaches the summit just after the 168th.
9. The US 167th and 168th Infantry troops atop the Côte de Châtillon repel two German counterattacks with the help of a barrage from the US 5th Field Artillery Brigade. Night falls with the Côte de Châtillon in the hands of MacArthur's US 84th Brigade.

# BREAKING THE KRIEMHILDE STELLUNG AT CÔTE DE CHÂTILLON, OCTOBER 14–16, 1918

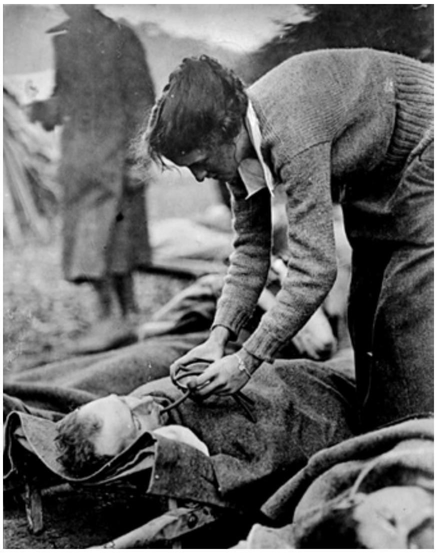
Menoher's US 42nd "Rainbow" Division attacks the central heights of the Kriemhilde Stellung, defended by the Prussians of the 41.Infanterie-Division. Lenihan's left-hand 83rd Brigade meets disaster assaulting St-Georges and Landres-et-St-Georges, but after several attempts, MacArthur's 84th Brigade successfully takes the Côte de Châtillon.


LANDRES-ET-ST-GEORGES
OCT 16
N
A
8
7
3
CÔTE DE CHÂTILLON
9
4
6
1
LA TUILERIE FARM
BOIS DE BANTHEVILLE
1
CÔTE DE MALDAH
HILL 242
OCT 15
5
BOIS DE ROMAGNE
XX
OCT 14
3
HILL 288
BOIS DE GESNES
XX
BOIS DE MONCY
OCT 13
XXX
Argonnen
VON KLEIST
XX
41
VON DER HARDT

**GERMAN**

**A.** 41.Infanterie-Division (Von der Hardt)
5.Westpreussisches Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 148
Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 152

Note: gridlines are shown at intervals of 1km (0.62 miles)



Red Cross nurse Anna Rochester, from Buffalo, New York, tends a wounded US 42nd Division sergeant at First Army's Souilly headquarters, October 14, 1918. The region's horrible roads delayed American ambulances by hours; at one field hospital, a horrified doctor opened the doors of a recently arrived ambulance only to find every man dead. (Library of Congress)

beyond all expectations." The German machine gunners either overlooked the innocuously advancing American squad or failed to fully comprehend what was happening. At a range of 150 yards, the eight Americans took cover and then unleashed a vicious rifle grenade bombardment against the German machine-gun nests. Desperate German return fire was too high. Bewildered at the sudden devastating bombardment, surviving Germans promptly surrendered. Strom's attack had suffered zero casualties. The AEF's official historian explained: "When Strom reported to his commander, he turned over ten machine guns, fifteen prisoners, and the key to Côte Dame Marie."

As Pershing later recounted, "The capture of the Romagne Heights, especially their dominating feature, Côte Dame Marie, was a decisive blow." On October 16 (D+20), First US Army had finally achieved all of Pershing's D-Day operational objectives. US forces had pierced the Kriemhilde Stellung, but were far too battered to plunge entirely through and into the Bois de Bantheville as originally planned. The major American efforts of October 4 and October 14–16 had been moderately successful, but the breakthrough into German rear areas remained elusive.

## AMERICAN PRELIMINARIES FOR THE FINAL BLOW, OCTOBER 16–31

Liggett assumed First US Army command on October 16. Immediate crises awaited him. Among these was the American front lines' demand for 25,000 tons of supplies per day. Unfortunately, Services of Supply (SOS) had established its logistics for St-Mihiel, not the Meuse-Argonne. Railheads were too far removed from the new front, and lines of communication were ad hoc; US engineers would construct or repair 146 miles of narrow-gauge rail to supply the front. Existing French standard-gauge lines were also repaired and extended into the battlefield as fast as possible. Meanwhile, heavy traffic and drenching rains ravaged the Meuse-Argonne's primitive road network. US engineers constantly repaired the roads, often resurfacing them with crushed German pillbox material. Additionally, by October 8, First Army was short 50,000 horses and mules, further straining transportation.

AEF inspectors additionally reported up to 100,000 Americans were straggling—either milling about the rear or sheltering in abandoned dugouts. While some were intentionally shirking combat, an official US Army history admits, "most of the straggling resulted from systemic problems with the army's training, mobilization, and organization." Many were lost, confused about their orders, or simply scrounging for adequate food or clothing. Quite simply, the AEF had not fully upheld its end of the social contract and was now reaping the consequences.

Liggett understood that American straggling was largely due to the AEF's untrained officers and poorly improvised logistics, rather than rampant

Ruins of Grandpré in October 1918. World War I's Western Front is mostly remembered as a war of mud, trenches, and stalemate, but much fighting also occurred on foot in forests and shattered urban ruins, such as those seen here. The nature of Western Front combat therefore was not always so different from World War II. (American Battle Monuments Commission, World War I Battlefield Companion)

personal cowardice. Supply failures meant front-line US troops largely lacked sufficient rain or cold weather gear, requiring American infantry to sleep in wet, icy shell holes that typically left them shivering all night in their inadequate summer uniforms. The constant overcast, morning fog, steep hills, dark, dense forests, and inexperienced junior officers made it all too easy for well-meaning troops to become separated from their units—some men spent days fighting with outfit after outfit until they found their way back to their own unit. Field rations and rolling kitchens often never arrived at the front, meaning assault troops often went days without food.

In the short term, Liggett established military police lines to round stragglers up. Liggett's long-term solution was to expedite the forward issuing of adequate rations, clothing, and hygiene services. Mobile field showers streamed forward, new clothing and underwear were issued, and mobile "cootie trucks" helped steam uniforms free of "seam squirrels" (lice). Meanwhile, subordinate officers' fixes varied. Some ordered grenades thrown into every bunker American patrols passed. Repeat stragglers were shamed by being forced to wear signs proclaiming their status. Many West Pointers desired the traditional remedy of firing squads, which President Wilson dismissed out of hand.

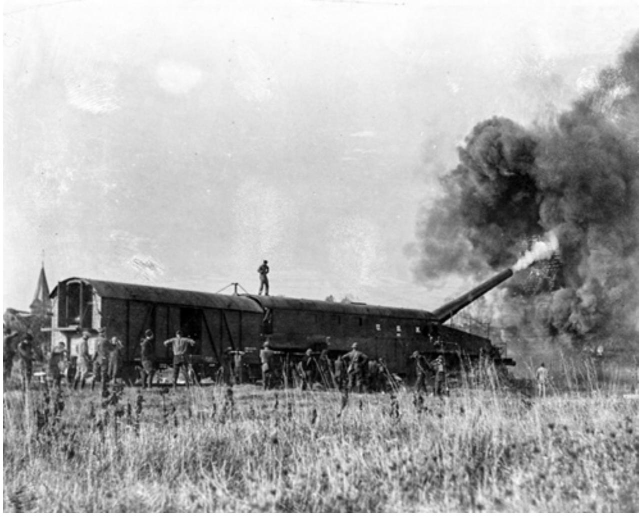
More ominously, Ludendorff's Spring Offensives had shocked the US government into rushing as many Americans as possible to France regardless of their condition. Doughboys were now arriving after just two weeks' training. The US 307th Infantry commander claimed that 90 percent of his 850–900 replacements had never fired a rifle or thrown a grenade; front-line officers frequently reported—just before a scheduled assault—having to teach replacements how to load their rifle or wear their gas mask. Liggett fortunately lacked Pershing's unrealistic nationalist chauvinism. "I am under no patriotic illusion that one good American can whip any ten foreigners," Liggett later claimed. "I know, on the contrary, that one well-trained, well-led foreigner is much more likely to whip ten good but untrained Americans."

Nevertheless, the Hindenburg Line had been punctured and the Meuse-Argonne's commanding central heights were in American hands. First US Army had irreversibly seized the strategic advantage from the German defenders. Liggett initiated a series of small, hard-fought local actions to extend and consolidate American control over the advantageous central high terrain. The goal was to straighten US lines between Grandpré in the west and the Meuse in the east before launching a final decisive offensive.

By October 24, the US 78th Division would capture Grandpré in fierce fighting. The following day, the 78th Division would push 1½ miles north, roll up a lateral stretch of the Kriemhilde Stellung, and advance 1,000 yards deep into the Bois de Bourgogne. In the center, the US V Corps would secure the Bois des Rappes by October 22, while the right-hand US III Corps would capture the Bois de Forêt. Although successful, these consolidation attacks would cost the 77th, 78th, 82nd, and 42nd divisions alone over 13,000 casualties by October 31.

SIGNAL CORPS U.S.A.
32042

Leaning out of his Renault FT light tank, US 321st Tank Company's Sergeant Paul Postal poses with adopted kitten "Mustard" on October 31, 1918. Stray animals found roaming the battlefield were eagerly adopted by American troops, who elevated them into unit mascots. One Meuse-Argonne anecdote has five doughboys diving on top of an adopted dog during a German gas attack. (PhotoQuest/Getty Images)



A US Navy 14in./50 Mark 4 railway gun at Thierville bombards the major railyard of Longuyon, nearly 22 miles away. Each gun comprised a single 71-man battery and included one locomotive, the gun car, and 13 additional auxiliary cars in a single train. The gun car itself weighed 270 tons. (Naval History and Heritage Command, NH 49957)

Meanwhile, Pershing had fired the 5th Division's overwhelmed McMahon on October 16, followed by the 3rd Division's hot-aired Major-General Beaumont Buck. Pershing then finally expelled the politically entrenched Major-General Clarence Edwards of New England's 26th "Yankee" Division; the belligerent Edwards had long antagonized AEF leadership. By late October, Pershing had personally relieved one corps commander, three divisional commanders, and four brigade commanders.

Weeks earlier, the German Empire had extended its first peace feelers to the United States government. Pershing addressed the development to his generals on October 17:

> Now that Germany and the Central Powers are losing, they are begging for an armistice. Their request is an acknowledgment of weakness and clearly means that the Allies are winning the war … She must be given no opportunity to recuperate … There can be no conclusion to this war until Germany is brought to her knees. Pershing.

Meanwhile, on October 21, the fiery Clemenceau again wrote Foch demanding the "invincibly obstinate" Pershing's relief. Foch once more defended the Americans, noting the difficult Meuse-Argonne terrain, the AEF's steep learning curve, and that Pershing readily dispatched US reinforcements to British or French commanders when requested. Because of this, Pershing directly commanded only 20 out of 30 AEF divisions. British and French armies controlled the other ten, plus US II Corps headquarters—over 300,000 American troops. Indeed, on October 15, Foch had requested two additional US divisions to assist the French 6e Armeé and the Belgians attacking Flanders in the north. Pershing dispatched the US 37th and 91st divisions, and these would enter the line in Flanders on October 30. If necessary, Foch told Clemenceau, he could shift more AEF divisions to French or British command without overly challenging Pershing's authority.

Meanwhile, Rear Admiral Charles Plunkett's US Navy railway batteries of three massive 14in./50 Mark 4 battleship guns had arrived at the Meuse-Argonne. Deploying at Thierville and Verdun, batteries nos. 3, 4, and 5 opened fire on the German railhead of Longuyon on October 23. Range was 38,500 yards (22 miles). The Americans were confident of the battleship guns' effectiveness, having observed what these same 14in. monsters had previously wrought elsewhere on the Western Front:

> The effect on the railroads … was all that could be desired. One hit from the 14-inch naval guns was sufficient to wreck a railroad line of three tracks for a distance of at least 100 feet, tearing the rails up, shattering the ties, and blowing an enormous crater in the roadbed.

By October 30, the USN's fourth 14in./50 battleship gun, Battery No. 2, had arrived at Charny, and began bombarding Montmédy from 37,382 yards

(21.2 miles). Battery No. 2 fired six 1,400 lb shells between 1204hrs and 1229hrs, scoring a direct hit on a moving German troop train and causing "considerable casualties." However, German counterbattery fire derailed two of Battery No. 2's ten railcars and killed several nearby US Army engineers. Similar counterbattery fire against USN Battery No. 4 killed five additional personnel.

Gouraud's lagging French 4e Armée had reached the American left wing on October 27. The US 36th Division, still in Champagne, would be relieved the following day. Since October 10, US 36th Division casualties totaled 1,059. East of the Meuse, the French XVII Corps reached the Consenvoye Heights on October 31, evening out First US Army's right wing. The Americans had driven 13 miles deep into German lines and had captured 18,600 prisoners, 370 artillery pieces, and 1,000 machine guns. First US Army had suffered over 22,000 killed, 100,000 combat wounded, and 16,000 influenza casualties. Pershing duly requested an additional 1,500 nurses from the United States, cutting into transport berths. By November 1, the AEF required 90,000 replacements, mostly infantry. Even though 202,663 American troops had landed in France in October, only 45,000 combat replacements would be available. Additionally, First Army air strength had fallen to just 475 serviceable aircraft.

Nevertheless, German prospects looked increasingly grim. Marwitz's 5.Armee had lost 33,000 men the last two weeks of October. There were no replacements left. Meanwhile, Austria-Hungary had begun seeking separate peace terms on October 28, forcing Marwitz and Gallwitz to transfer their three Austrian divisions to the rear. As October expired, advancing US troops discovered a letter a German officer had written to his wife: "The Americans are here. We can kill them but we can't stop them."

## BREAKOUT, NOVEMBER 1

On October 25, Liggett had conferred with Gouraud regarding the offensive's resumption. The 4e Armée, an excited Gouraud had virtually despaired, "cannot possibly move before November 2. The Army simply can't be made ready an hour earlier." Liggett later admitted he was "secretly delighted" by this development, and agreed to postpone his October 28 attack to November 1.

Between the Bois de Bourgogne and the Meuse, seven front-line German divisions faced the Americans, with three divisions under von Kleist's western Argonnen Gruppe and four divisions in the east under von Oven's Maasgruppe West. First US Army retained its standard corps arrangement, from left to right: US I Corps, US V Corps, US III Corps, and east of the Meuse, French XVII Corps. Liggett prepared a set-piece attack for the new offensive, utilizing lessons First US Army had learned at such high cost the previous five weeks. Unlike Pershing, Liggett carefully selected limited and achievable objectives within range of supporting artillery. The primary attack by Summerall's central V Corps would advance only 5 miles, but would drive the Germans out of the Barricourt Heights and the Buzancy area. Hines' III Corps would support V Corps' right, turning the east flank of the Bois de Barricourt. Dickman's I Corps would protect V Corps' left and eventually drive on Boult-aux-Bois.

American troops and 155mm Grande Puissance Filloux (GPF) guns at the First US Army artillery park, Souilly. The French contribution to AEF artillery cannot be overstated. Only five AEF guns in the entire war (the USN's converted 14in. battleship guns) were American-built, American-manned, and fired American-produced ordnance. (adoc-photos/Getty Images)

The November 1, 1918 attack would usher in a profound transformation in AEF tactics that resonates down to the present day. From now on, firepower, not maneuver, would be the American way of war. Liggett and his staff prepared crushing artillery fires, with Summerall, a career artillery officer, explicitly stating in his V Corps attack order: "It is essential that fire superiority rather than sheer manpower be the driving force of the attack." Some 1,576 guns were assembled at the front, and enough shells stockpiled to allow an average of 235 rounds per gun per day. Among these were special 7-mile-range 1917 model D shells, which allowed the 75mms to support the infantry longer before displacing forward. In the days preceding the attack, US artillery, aided by extensive photoreconnaissance, made preparatory bombardments of German batteries and command posts, while occasional, brief full barrages against German lines masked that US batteries were preregistering German targets. Finally, the initial D-Day barrage would open with a two-hour "hurricane bombardment" to shatter German command and control, defensive hardpoints, and counterbattery capability.

Additionally, whereas US officers had been timid with poison gas in September and October, they would employ gas aggressively against the Germans in November. Liggett ordered German artillery concentrations on the Côtes de Meuse, and the Bois de Sassey and the Bois de Bourgogne be drenched in mustard gas. There would be no enfilading German artillery fire holding up the American advance this time.

Seven US divisions would make the November 1 assault. Spearheading Summerall's V Corps attack was Lejeune's elite 2nd Division and Major-General William Wright's well-trained 89th Division. They would be supported by field-artillery brigades and machine-gun battalions and companies borrowed from the reserve 1st and 42nd divisions, meaning over 300 guns would back each attacking division. In addition to the concentrated hammering by full army, corps, and divisional artillery, V Corps' entire machine-gun allotment would rake the Barricourt Heights with direct and indirect fire. Lejeune's 2nd Division alone, attacking over a 2½-mile front, would be supported by army and corps heavy artillery, three field artillery brigades, 80 smoke projectors, 12 trench mortars, 255 machine guns, and all 18 remaining tanks.

German troops in a Meuse-Argonne defensive trench fire back at Americans, while under artillery bombardment. One of their comrades appears to have already succumbed to gas. The iconic "coal scuttle" German helmets confirm the late-war aspect of this photograph. (Bettmann via Getty Images)

After the initial hurricane bombardment, a carefully coordinated creeping barrage would methodically advance at preplanned rates: 100m for every four minutes over open ground, 100m for every six minutes up slopes, and 100m for every eight minutes through woods. Firing would be as rapid as possible with 10–12 rounds per minute from each 75mm gun, with one 75mm per three-gun battery firing shrapnel just ahead of the other two's high-explosive shells. US infantry would advance closely behind two successive 75mm curtains; the twin rolling barrages would themselves follow 500m behind a wall of 155mm fire. Finally, 1,000m ahead of the infantry's 75mm barrage would be the rolling bombardment of the 8in. howitzers. "The barrage plan," Summerall explained, "was so constructed that throughout the advance, the entire corps front of more than eight kilometers (5 miles) would be covered by a sheet of shell, shrapnel, and bullets to a depth of 1,200 meters (1,312 yards)."

Thanks to aerial reconnaissance and prisoner interrogation, by October 30, Gallwitz was confident of a renewed American offensive, although he was uncertain on which side of the Meuse it would appear. That Liggett would attack almost entirely west of the Meuse would again take Gallwitz by surprise. Touring American lines, Summerall fired up his assault divisions: "Way up there north is a railroad. Go cut it for me. If you cut it soon enough, you may very well end this war."

At 0330hrs, November 1, First US Army opened fire. A US 2nd Division brigade history related that the sky became "alight from then until daybreak with the constant flashes seeming to come from every ravine for miles to the rear. The ground shook to the explosions. It was the supreme power of the Artillery, absolute devastation." Lejeune himself watched the bombardment in awe:

> It was, if anything, more terrific than at Saint-Mihiel, and seemed as if it were an elemental cataclysm closely approximating the simultaneous eruption of many volcanoes, combined with continuous lightning and the innumerable reverberations which characterize a thunderstorm in a mountain county.

In the wake of the American bombardment was death and destruction. "What a battlefield!" blurted an advancing US officer. "The Kriemhilde Stellung had been torn to shreds by the American guns. Upon the fields, along every approach, and in the trenches, still lay the [German] dead." Summerall recalled, "Many of the prisoners captured on the 1st stated that the reason that they were taken was that artillery concentrations were so effective as to confine them to shelters and to isolate them in small groups. Artillery prisoners stated that they were unable to leave their shelters to serve their guns." Touring the devastation, an ecstatic Summerall encountered First Army's artillery chief, Major-General Edward F. McGlachlin: "Oh my God, Mac," Summerall gushed, "Your wonderful artillery!" The AEF had at last adopted the modern European way of war: "Artillery conquers, infantry occupies."

American tactics had improved in the air as well. Whereas previous US air strikes had been raids against German communications, dumps, and rear concentrations, on November 1, US bombers engaged in close support of advancing US infantry. These American bombings and strafings of German infantry and artillery ultimately contributed "direct material and moral assistance … during the critical stages of the attack."

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US 23rd Infantry, 2nd Division troops take cover in a shattered Meuse-Argonne Forest. They are crewing a 37mm gun. According to at least one postwar study, the US 2nd Division was the most combat-effective AEF division of the war. (US Army Signal Corps/American Stock/Getty Images)

In the center, US V Corps drenched St-Georges and Landres-et-St-Georges with poison gas and high-explosives. An American private watched as the latter was crushed beneath a huge, sinister cloud that billowed "greenish-yellow, shot with coils of writhing black, with now and then a livid flame to light it all." At least 300 St-Georges defenders were evacuated to field hospitals as gas casualties, 20 dying within hours. The twin villages quickly fell to Lejeune's 2nd Division. About 1,000 troops of the German 52.Infanterie-Division were captured at Landres-et-St-Georges; a mere 206 escaped.

With the artillery fire thundering overhead finally going the other direction, American infantry morale soared. Advancing uphill, Summerall's V Corps and Hines' III Corps "carried their attacks with great dash and spirit" to the northern edge of the Bois de Barricourt and center of the Bois de la Folie, having broken through the German defensive system and artillery lines. By nightfall, the American attack had advanced 6 miles and torn open a 10-mile-wide gash in German lines. The damage was irreparable. "On November 1," an American historian observed, "Liggett launched his attack behind a flurry of hot metal and noxious smoke that tore through the shreds of the Germans in front of him. By then both sides were out of their trenches and the German frontier was within sight."

## PURSUIT, NOVEMBER 2–10

The evening of November 1, not realizing that Dickman's left-hand I Corps was merely to have "threatened furiously," Pershing telephoned Liggett "expressing great satisfaction but remarking that the left of the [First] Army was held up." Liggett confidently informed Pershing the Germans would be gone the next morning. Meanwhile, Liggett's artillery hammered the Bois de Bourgogne with 41.4 tons of mustard gas, which destroyed or expelled nine of the forest's 12 German batteries. By early November 2, the Germans had indeed withdrawn entirely from the Bois de Bourgogne.

By morning, Marwitz had rushed in the Prussian 41.Infanterie-Division to plug the gap facing US V Corps. German troops at first offered serious resistance, but the US blow was so heavy that "the enemy's consequent demoralization" refused to permit any return to offensive action. Meanwhile, First US Army's offensive "continued with great force, hurl[ing] the enemy across the Meuse, while I Corps, preceding the French Fourth Army to Boult-aux-Bois, drove the hostile rearguards north along the east bank of the Bar River."

The US 305th Infantry, 77th Division advances toward Buzancy on November 3, 1918. After 38 horrific days slogging upwards into prepared German killing zones, the Americans were finally attacking downhill. Although a New York division, many of the 77th Division's troops were replacements from the American West. (National Archives and Records Administration)

On November 2, Wright's US 89th Division conquered the Meuse-Argonne's crest, the 1,122ft Barricourt Heights. From here, the battlefield's rugged defensive terrain at last gave way to gently sloping open country ideal for offense. US Army newspaper *Stars and Stripes* proclaimed:

> The thick wall of the German resistance in Argonne against which the First Army has been hammering since the last week in September gave way with a crash on

> November 1, and the Yankee troops who had gone stubbornly through more than a month of murderous, inch-by-inch, hammer-and-tongs fighting at last came into their reward.

The German 5.Armee's November 2 war diary confessed:

> All the frontline commanders report that the Americans are attacking in mass formations in the general direction of Stenay, and that the [German] troops are fighting courageously but just cannot do anything. Therefore it has become imperative that 5.Armee be withdrawn in rear of the Meuse and that said withdrawal be effected immediately.

As First US Army tore after the reeling Germans, Liggett shifted his offensive axis, slowly wheeling from north to northeast in order to eventually cross the Meuse en masse. By late November 2, the Americans had crashed through the last-ditch Freya Stellung. German machine gunners, distributed in depth, fought stubborn rearguard actions, but no significant prepared German defenses of any kind remained west of the Meuse.

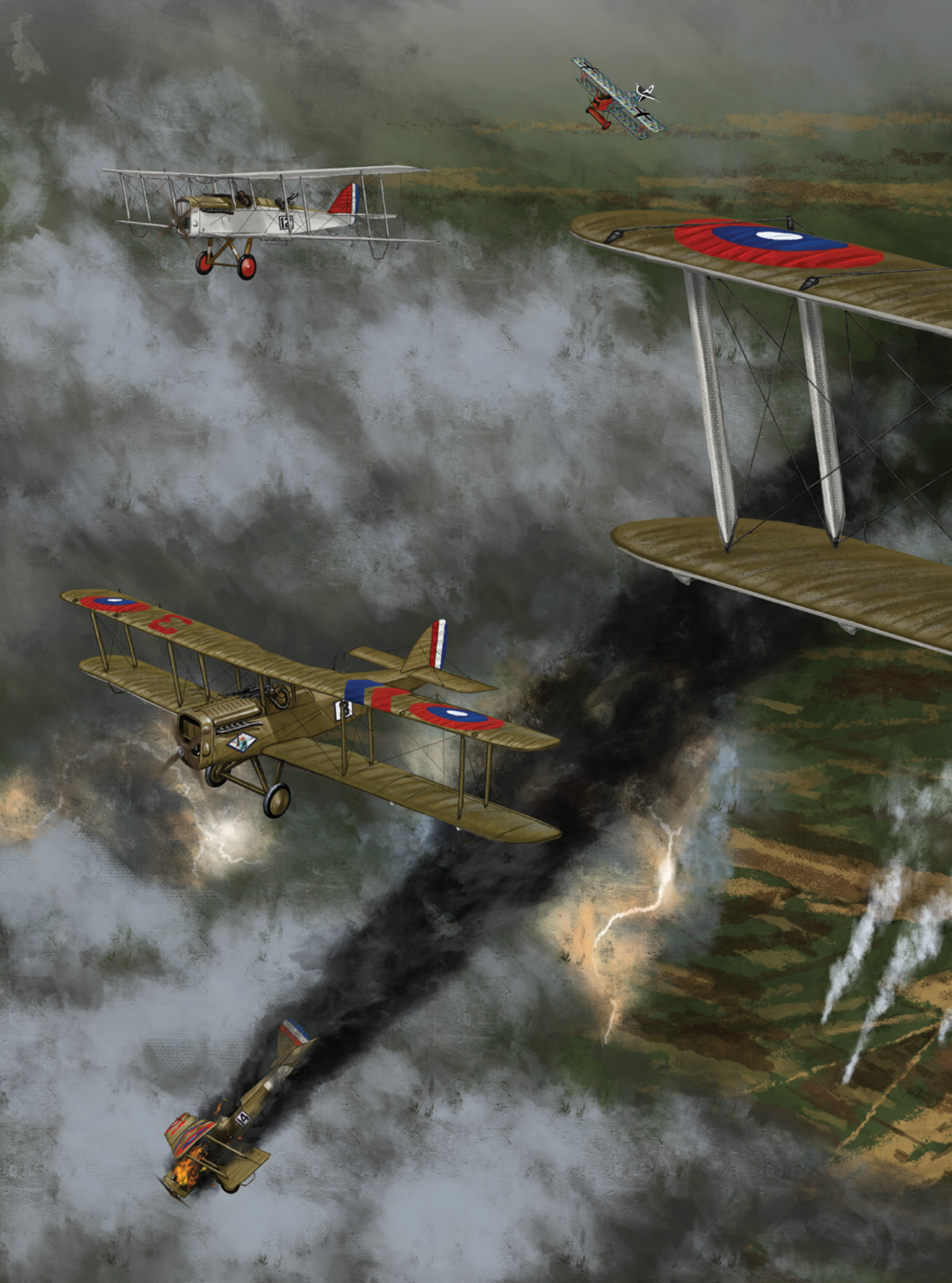
The breakthrough's most unusual advance came that evening from Lejeune's US 2nd Division, experimenting with nighttime infiltration tactics. Accompanied by horse-drawn 75mm batteries, about 4,000 Americans had begun stealthily proceeding in two columns through German lines in the dark. At the columns' heads and flanks, German-fluent US patrols talked their way through enemy sentries by impersonating superior officers. By morning November 3, US 2nd Division had advanced 4 miles overnight. That evening, screened by the nighttime downpour, 2nd Division rolled the dice again. At 2330hrs, November 3, the lead battalions reached La Tuilerie Farm. The Americans kicked in the door of the brightly lit farmhouse and captured a German battalion's stunned headquarters company. By morning November 4, Lejeune's 2nd Division had advanced another 2½ miles.

By now, the full Deutsches Heer was in full retreat across the entire Western Front, having begun withdrawing to the notional Antwerp–Meuse line late on November 3. Overnight, OHL temporarily transferred von Kleist's Argonnen Gruppe and von Oven's Maasgruppe West to von Einem's 3.Armee. Together, they withdrew north. To the south, Marwitz's remaining German 5.Armee began its Meuse crossing north of Stenay. Liggett's headquarters announced:

> The enemy is apparently unable to recover from the shock of our surprise attack. His main line of resistance has been ruptured and his forces are retiring in disorder; his troops are disorganized; his reserves have been absorbed and some of his divisions are retiring on their own initiative without orders.

Meanwhile, Austria-Hungary officially quit the war on November 3, prompting a mass Austrian exodus the following day. Gallwitz's three Austrian divisions and the KuK XVIII.Korpskommando began marching back to Austria via Germany, having suffered 19,295 casualties (including 6,182 killed and captured) since arriving on the Western Front in late July.

The German withdrawal toward Sedan now approached a rout, as the Americans finally had the Germans on the run. German infantry piled haphazardly into any available trucks to escape. Behind them, Americans piled into their own meager trucks to pursue. Here at last was Pershing's "open warfare."



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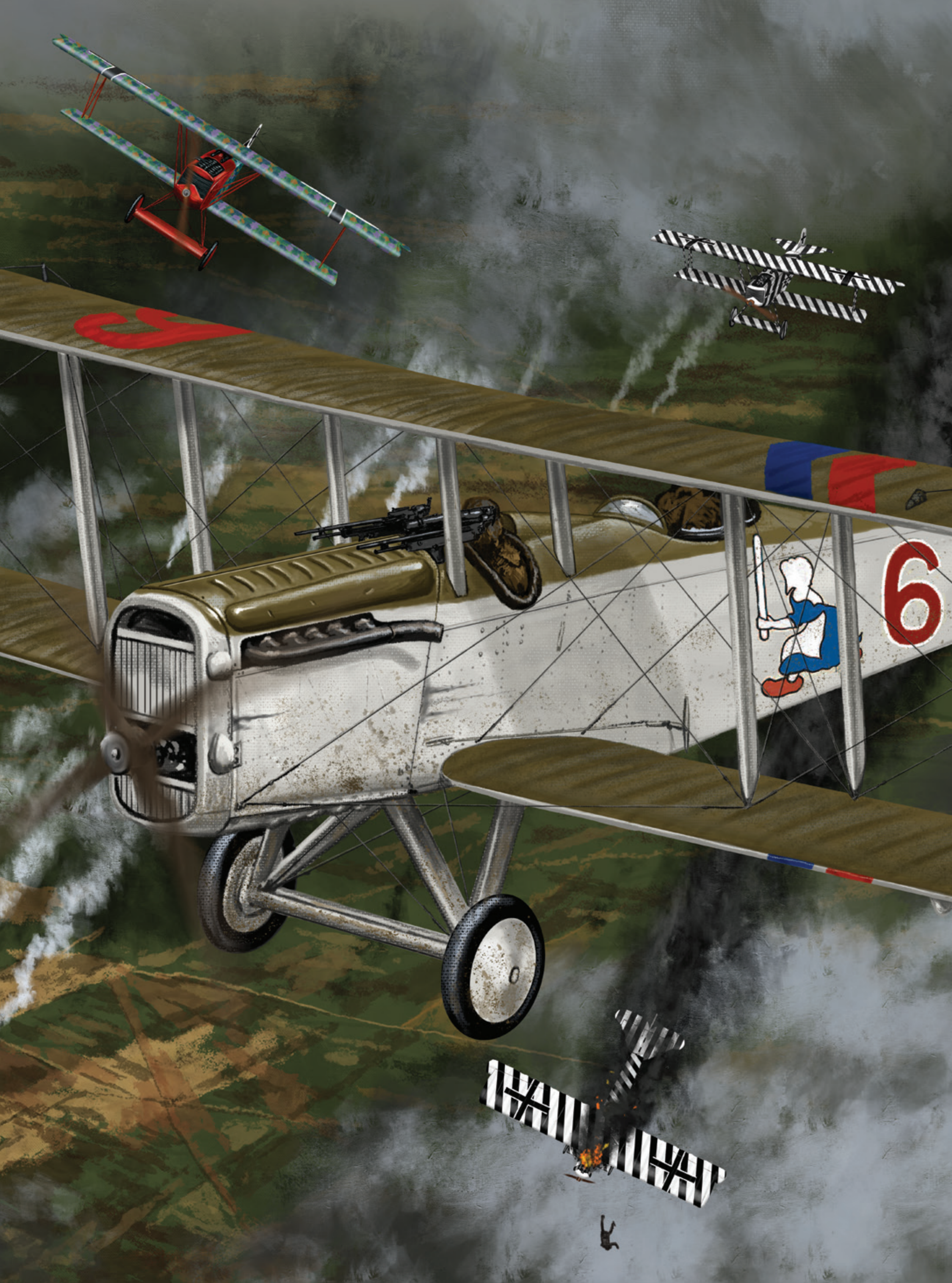
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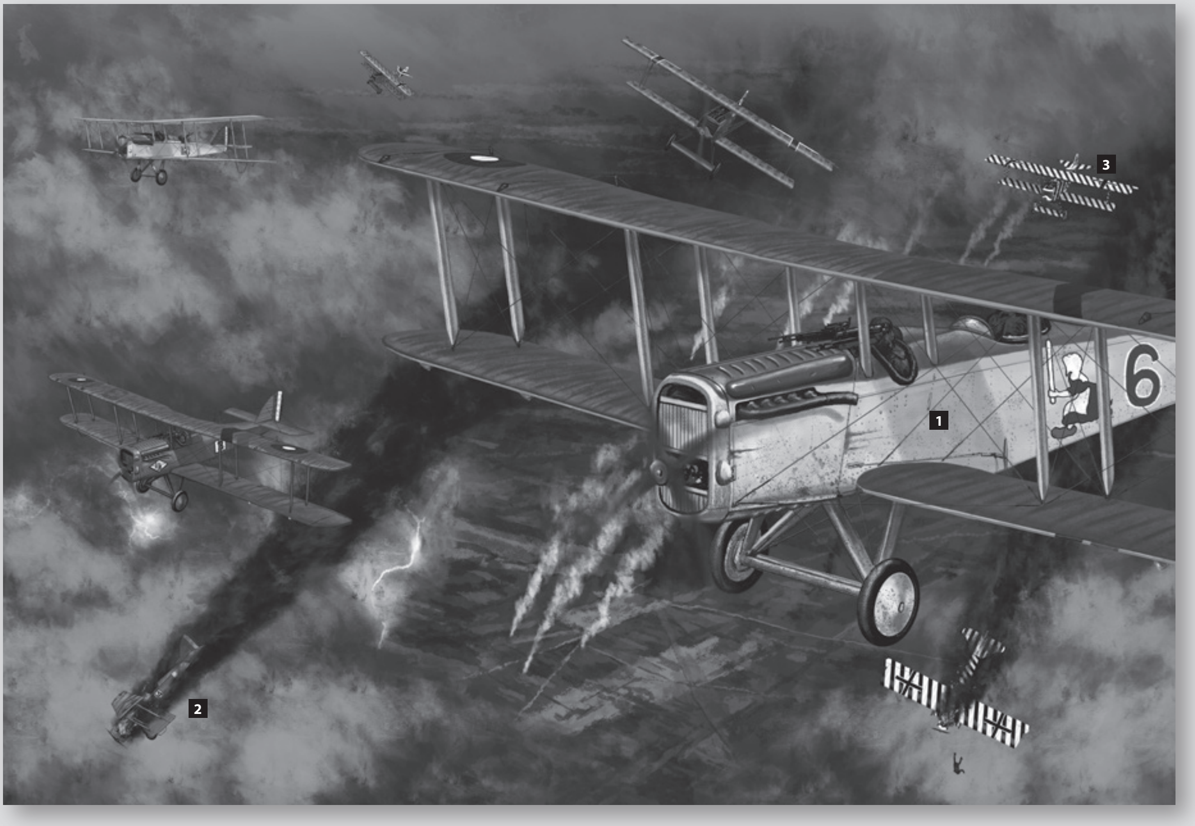


**JAGDGESCHWADER I FOKKER D.VII FIGHTERS ATTACK DE HAVILLAND DH.4 BOMBERS OF THE US FIRST DAY BOMBARDMENT GROUP, NOVEMBER 4, 1918 (PP. 78–79)**

American air commander Brigadier-General Billy Mitchell overwhelmingly favored deep interdiction over close air support. After reconnaissance discovered a major German troop concentration at Damvillers-Wavrille, about 5 miles east of the Meuse, during early morning October 9, Mitchell quickly organized the largest raid of the Meuse-Argonne campaign. Two formations totaling 360 French and American aircraft struck the area with 30 tons of bombs. Mitchell claimed 12 German planes were shot down for a single Franco-American loss, while French intelligence claimed the raid killed 250 German troops. Simultaneously, 18 bombers of the US First Day Bombardment group hit St-Juvin and Bantheville. British RAF bombers attacked later that night, meaning that German positions had endured a total of 80 tons of bombs dropped on them in 24 hours.

Mitchell's interdiction attacks continued on a daily basis, whenever possible. On November 4, some 39 De Havilland DH.4 bombers (**1**) of the US First Day Bombardment Group successfully bombed the Montmédy rail yards. US 1st Day Bombardment Group lost two of 39 bombers during the raid, including the group leader to antiaircraft fire. The American bombers' sole air-to-air loss, from the 11th Aero Squadron, is seen going down in flames (**2**). Both crew members, Lieutenant Charles Dana Coates and Lieutenant Loren R. Thrall, were killed. The Fokker D.VIIs (**3**) are represented here in the colors of Oberleutnant Hermann Göring's Jagdgeschwader I (the late Red Baron's famed "Flying Circus"), who claimed four enemy kills that day, one quite possibly being Coates and Thrall. American bombers claimed to have shot down seven German attackers. Both the German and especially the American claims were likely exaggerations.

The US First Day Bombardment Group saw its last combat of the war on November 5. A single squadron, eight DH.4s of the 20th Aero, found the Mouzon target and accurately bombed it through a hole in the clouds. Jumped by a huge formation of Fokkers, three US bombers were lost and one Fokker was shot down.

Jagdgeschwader I saw its last action the following day, when it claimed four SPADs. On November 9, the group began planning to withdraw to Germany, but then on November 11, in accordance with Armistice terms, they flew to Darmstadt and Strasbourg to surrender their aircraft to French authorities, taking care to land hard and destroy their planes in the process.

A contingent of US 16th Infantry (1st Division) advances under fire through Thélonne while en route to Sedan on November 7, 1918. These men have been without sleep all night after marching many miles in the dark. They are less than 1 mile from the banks of the Meuse, and about 2 miles from Sedan. (*American Armies and Battlefields in Europe*, 1938, public domain)

First US Army's attempts to cross the marshy, rain-swollen Meuse had begun as early as 0100hrs, November 3, with the US 5th Division first trying between Brieulles and Dun-sur-Meuse. German defenders, upon discovering the operation, greeted the Americans with severe fire from the bluffs above. "The whole area was drenched with seemingly inexhaustible fire from the height," reported a doughboy. After intense, back-and-forth fighting, the US 5th Division threw the Bavarian 5.Reserve-Division deep behind the Meuse banks. By nightfall, November 5, the 5th Division had established a 1-mile-deep bridgehead over the Meuse's east bank and its parallel canal.

### *The race to Sedan, November 5–10*

The Americans were now in total pursuit mode. Pershing ordered American truck convoys to "use lights on all motor transport" at night, a development immediately noticed by Gallwitz. Pershing additionally urged his generals to "push troops forward wherever resistance is broken, without regard for fixed objectives and without fear for their flanks."

The US 42nd, 77th, and 1st divisions closed in on Sedan as German forces began to flee. Strategically, Sedan's value was as a railhead. Strictly speaking, Sedan need not be occupied, as its crucial four-track rail line could be cut by artillery. By November 3, US heavy guns had been advanced to "fire on the sole line of rail communication which supplied all of the German Army from Picardy to Carignan, southeast of Sedan." The following day, after the USN's 14in. railway Battery No. 2 shelled Montmédy, aerial reconnaissance reported "the entire lower Montmédy freight yards on fire." Pershing observed:

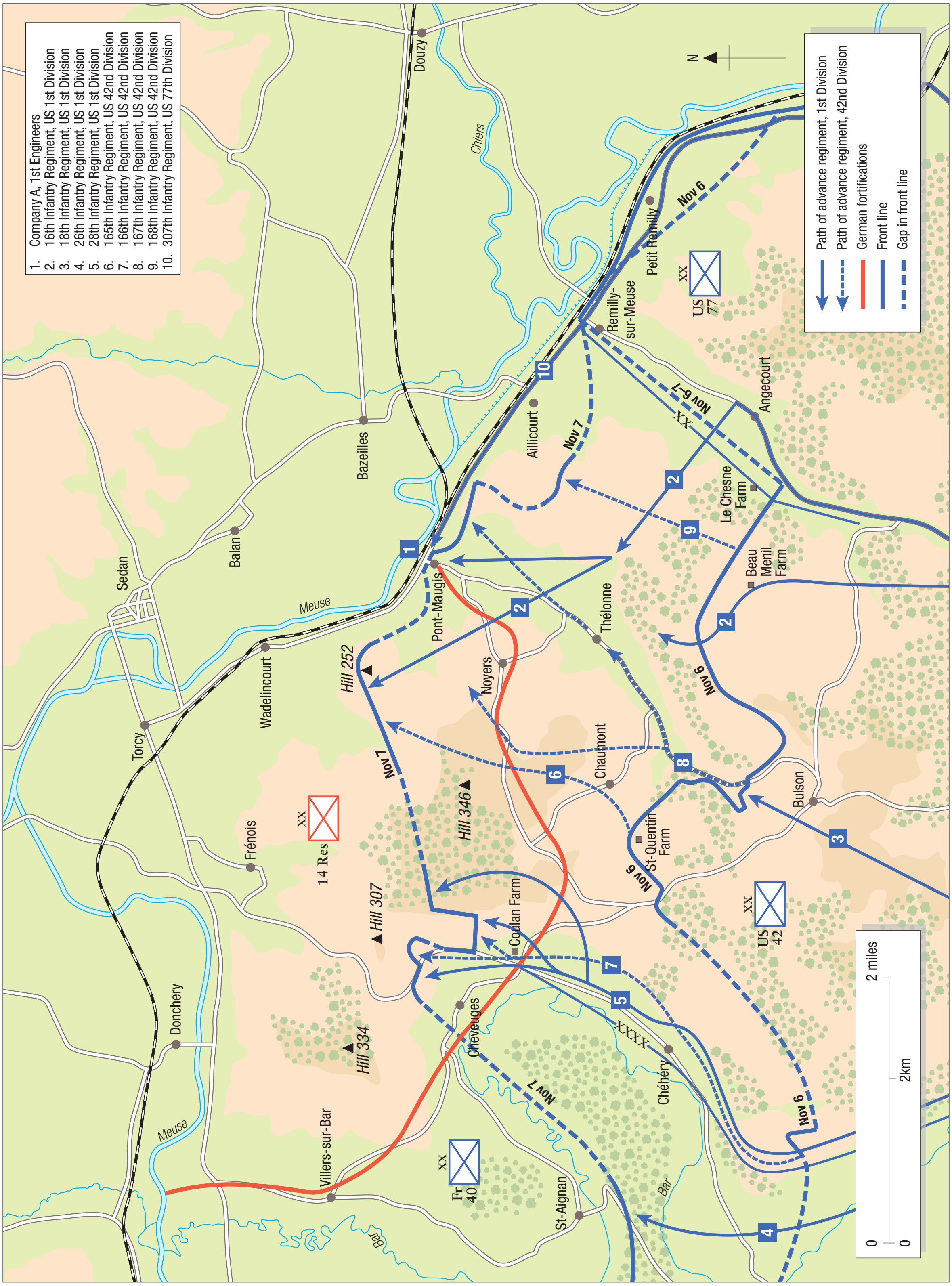
> Our large-caliber guns had advanced and were skillfully brought into position to fire upon the important lines at Montmédy, Longuyon, and Conflans—the strategical goal which was our highest hope was gained. We had cut the enemy's main line of communications and nothing but surrender or an armistice could save his army from complete disaster.

Major-General Charles P. Summerall and Brigadier-General Frank Parker, October 1918. Neither Liggett nor Dickman would forgive Parker's Sedan actions after the war, while Summerall possessed sufficient rank to simply hang Parker out to dry. Parker remained resentful, claiming that following Summerall's order set his own career back five years. (US Army Signal Corps, public domain)

Northwest of Sedan, von Einem's 3.Armee began withdrawing across the Meuse the night of November 6. First US Army lines were now barely 1 mile from the Sedan railway, while Sedan itself was within light artillery range. What nevertheless transpired was a sordid three-way race between individual American and French divisions to become the first formation into Sedan. According to Liggett, US officers' intense Franco-Prussian War studies had eventually metastasized into an irrational "fetish with Sedan." Certainly, 1870 and 1914 made Sedan a prestigious objective. A purely American liberation of Sedan, Pershing likely imagined, would validate the AEF to French and British officials who had denigrated the Americans in general, and Pershing personally.

At 1730hrs, November 5, Pershing's AEF operations officer, Brigadier-General Fox Connor, announced to his First

## The race to Sedan, November 6–7, 1918


1. Company A, 1st Engineers
2. 16th Infantry Regiment, US 1st Division
3. 18th Infantry Regiment, US 1st Division
4. 26th Infantry Regiment, US 1st Division
5. 28th Infantry Regiment, US 1st Division
6. 165th Infantry Regiment, US 42nd Division
7. 166th Infantry Regiment, US 42nd Division
8. 167th Infantry Regiment, US 42nd Division
9. 168th Infantry Regiment, US 42nd Division
10. 307th Infantry Regiment, US 77th Division
Path of advance regiment, 1st Division
Path of advance regiment, 42nd Division
German fortifications
Front line
Gap in front line
N
0
2 miles
0
2km
Douzy
Chiers
Bazeilles
Balan
Sedan
Meuse
Wadelincourt
Torcy
Frénois
14 Res
XX
Donchery
Meuse
Villers-sur-Bar
Bar
Hill 334
Hill 307
Hill 252
Hill 346
Pont-Maugis
Noyers
Chaumont
Thélonne
Aillicourt
Remilly-sur-Meuse
Petit Remilly
US 77
XX
Angecourt
Le Chesne Farm
Beau Menil Farm
Bulson
St-Quentin Farm
US 42
XX
Coulan Farm
Cheveuges
Chéhéry
St-Aignan
Bar
Fr 40
XX
XXXX
XX
Nov 6
Nov 7
Nov 6–7
Nov 7
Nov 7
Nov 6
Nov 6
Nov 7
Nov 6
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US Army counterpart, Colonel George C. Marshall: "It is General Pershing's desire that the troops of the First Army should capture Sedan, and he directs that orders be issued accordingly." Incidentally, this required violating French 4e Armée territory, but the scheming Pershing believed he had secured such permission from his GAC superior Général Paul Maistre on November 3. Marshall duly drafted orders for I Corps, with V Corps in support, to march through the night to take Sedan. However, Liggett was absent touring the front, and a cautious Marshall hesitated 30 minutes. Liggett's chief of staff, Brigadier-General Hugh Drum, then signed the order in Liggett's absence, but—no doubt thinking of French 4e Armée—added, "Boundaries will not be considered binding." According to one AEF officer, allowing American forces to violate French boundaries to capture Sedan was as if Rochambeau had been "permitted to elbow Washington out of the reviewing stand at Yorktown." Inexplicably, Liggett was never informed of the order issued in his own name.

As drafted by Marshall and modified by Drum, First Army's soon-to-be infamous order read:

> 1. General Pershing desires that the honor of entering Sedan should fall to the First American Army. He has every confidence that the troops of the I Corps, assisted on their right by the V Corps, will enable him to realize this desire.
> 2. In transmitting the foregoing message, your attention is invited to the favorable opportunity now existing for pressing our advance throughout the night. Boundaries will not be considered binding.

Closest to Sedan was Dickman's US I Corps; to Dickman's left was Gouraud's French IX Corps. The following afternoon, November 6, Dickman logically complied by sending his nearest division, the 42nd Division, on toward Sedan. But—as Marshall's order reminded everyone—on I Corps' right was Summerall's US V Corps. That same afternoon, Summerall ordered his favorite outfit, Brigadier-General Frank Parker's 1st Division, to force march through the night for Sedan.

Not yet prepared to cross the Meuse, Parker instead ordered 1st Division to oblique left and simply march straight across the routes of I Corps' 77th and 42nd divisions in the dark—some 11 miles overnight. Parker's flippant maneuver immediately caused a wild mess, but the "Big Red One" stubbornly pushed on toward Sedan, "undeterred by the havoc it was creating," Dickman later described.

That evening, MacArthur's US 84th Brigade perched high above the Meuse, overlooking Sedan just 3 miles away. MacArthur expected to attack Sedan the following morning. After retiring to bed, MacArthur was notified that "strange troops" were overrunning 42nd Division bivouacs. Fearing friendly fire incidents, MacArthur rose and "proceeded within the front of the brigade in order to prevent personally any of these occurrences." Hours later, a US 16th Infantry patrol from the 1st Division came across a strange figure wearing quite non-AEF regulation clothing. Assuming the figure was German, the patrol allegedly took him prisoner at gunpoint. It was in fact the US 84th Brigade commander, a bemused Brigadier-General Douglas MacArthur. The Sedan

A typically dashing Brigadier-General Douglas MacArthur seen near Sedan in the war's final days. His scarf and crumpled officer's cap are noticeably non-regulation. After the "captured" MacArthur was "released," a wistful 1st Division private told him, "I was just thinking, sir, if you'd been a German general, we'd all be getting medals." MacArthur smiled and offered him a pack of cigarettes for consolation. (Hulton-Deutsch Collection/Corbis via Getty Images)

A photograph of Sedan, supposedly taken the day it was liberated, on November 7, 1918. The Ardennes are in the background. It was here at Sedan on September 2, 1870 that the French Emperor Napoleon III had surrendered himself and 104,000 French troops of the Armée de Châlons to the Prussians. (Bettmann via Getty Images)

incident, MacArthur's biographer wryly observed, was "the only controversy of MacArthur's career in which he was held blameless by all parties."

Despite the self-inflicted chaos, as November 7 dawned, the US 42nd and 1st divisions "violently attacked" the Sedan bridgehead, which was defended by the first-class German 14.Reserve-Division. Then, at 1000hrs, Gouraud's converging French 40e Division informed the 42nd Division they would open fire on any Americans obstructing their advance into Sedan. In fact, it was forward 1st Division patrols that were straying into French territory. Only at noon, November 7, when the French formally complained, did the incredulous Liggett finally discover the Sedan order in his name. Then came the news that Parker had marched his "division in seven columns—handling 25,000 men like a battalion—right through the First Army Corps upon Sedan." Liggett later recalled Sedan as "the only occasion in the war when I lost my temper completely." Enraged, Liggett ordered 1st Division to withdraw from I Corps' sector, then raced forward to confront the involved parties. Upon reaching I Corps headquarters, Liggett found an irate Dickman screaming over the telephone to anyone he could reach. Having composed himself before arriving, Liggett now soothed Dickman before departing for V Corps headquarters, where Summerall was conveniently absent. Liggett laid into Summerall's staff, lecturing that "no reasonable interpretation … would permit of the atrocity of marching one division across the front of another in pursuit of the enemy."

Coming to his senses, Pershing transferred US I Corps' sector over to French 4e Armée on November 7. The French 40e Division relieved the US 42nd and 1st divisions on November 7/8. Dickman's I Corps then passed into First US Army reserve. Nevertheless, the French graciously asked MacArthur for a detachment of Americans to liberate Sedan with them. Captain Russell Baker's Company D, 166th Infantry entered Sedan alongside 40e Division on November 9. That same day, Gouraud's French XI Corps liberated nearby Mézières.

Parker's 1st Division had lost 131 killed and 223 wounded during the Sedan operation, some almost certainly during an early morning November 7 firefight between the 1st and the 42nd. "Someone was glory hunting," rued a 1st Division regimental commander. "An army officer is dangerous when he begins to be a glory hunter." Incidentally, the "Big Red One" was not just Summerall's favorite, but Pershing's as well, and Liggett described the AEF commander-in-chief as "much amused at the rivalry between the First and Forty-second." Liggett did not share Pershing's mirth, claiming that only war's end a few days later kept him from court-martialing either Summerall or Parker, or both.

Nevertheless, between November 1 and November 7, First US Army had captured over 250 enemy guns, 2,000 machine guns, 5,000 rifles, 75 trench mortars, many antitank guns, and several hundred thousand rounds of artillery ammunition. Despite the overwhelming victory, a wistful Liggett later claimed if he had only had two cavalry divisions, he could have beaten Marwitz's 5.Armee to the Meuse and annihilated it.

Back at the Côtes de Meuse, French XVII Corps' US 79th Division had begun making slow, difficult headway against the German 228. and 192. divisions on November 3. The following day, German resistance crumbled. By November 6, French II Corps d'Armée Colonial assumed command from French XVII Corps. Three days later, the US 32nd Division entered the line. Since October 8, the US 33rd, 29th, 79th, and 26th divisions had suffered nearly 15,000 casualties assaulting the Meuse Heights.

Meanwhile, US III Corps' 90th Division began crossing the Meuse on November 9; by November 10, Hines' III Corps was entirely across the river. Hours later, Summerall's left-wing V Corps (US 2nd and 89th divisions) stormed across the Meuse bend between Pouilly and Beaumont. Immediately overhead, the 94th Aero Squadron's Major Maxwell Kirby shot down a Fokker D.VII, scoring the AEF's final air-to-air victory. Unknown to the Americans, that same day, Marwitz arrived at Gallwitz's Longwy headquarters demanding Germany sue for an armistice.

## BULLARD'S SECOND US ARMY ATTACKS, NOVEMBER 10–11

Foch's Grand Offensive was now succeeding spectacularly across all fronts. Foch's next operation was the long-awaited Franco-American offensive against German Lorraine, scheduled for November 14. Both First and Second US armies would participate, advancing alongside the 30 divisions of Général Édouard de Castelnau's GAE. The AEF's mission entailed "destroying the enemy's organization and driving him beyond the existing frontier in the region of Briey and Longwy," which included recovering the crucial Briey iron ore region. On the left, First US Army would advance on Longuyon and Longwy from Dun-sur-Meuse. In the center, from the St-Mihiel sector, Bullard's Second US Army would attack Generalleutnant Georg Fuchs' Armee Abteilung C; Bullard would turn Metz by simply bypassing it. To Bullard's right, Général Charles Mangin's French 10e Armée would attack toward Château-Salins.

By November 7, peace rumors ran rampant through Allied forces. Fearing German treachery, Foch warned all armies, "The enemy may spread the rumor that an armistice is signed in order to deceive us. There is none. Let no one cease hostilities of any sort without information from the commander-in-chief." Two days later, on November 9, Foch ordered Pershing to commence Second Army's offensive immediately; German forces were falling back in disorder and Second Army might yet produce a rout. Incidentally, most of Bullard's scheduled November 14 assault divisions were still assembling; Second US Army currently held St-Mihiel's 30-mile front with a mere 43,000 troops. Bullard's four front-line divisions, from left to right, were the US 33rd, 28th, 7th, and 92nd divisions. Behind them in reserve were the US 4th and 35th divisions, plus one brigade of the US 88th Division, arriving from Alsace.

At 0700hrs, November 10, Bullard's Second US Army opened its offensive

An August 2018 view of the American monument on Montsec hill at St-Mihiel battlefield, looking southwest toward what would have been the Second US Army in November 1918. By the time Bullard attacked here on November 10, the Deutsches Heer was in a state of total collapse. (JEAN-CHRISTOPHE VERHAEGEN/AFP via Getty Images)

**AMERICAN**

**FIRST US ARMY (LIGGETT)**

**US I Corps (Dickman)**

1. US 78th Division
2. US 77th Division
3. US 80th Division
4. US 42nd Division (corps reserve)

**US V Corps (Summerall)**

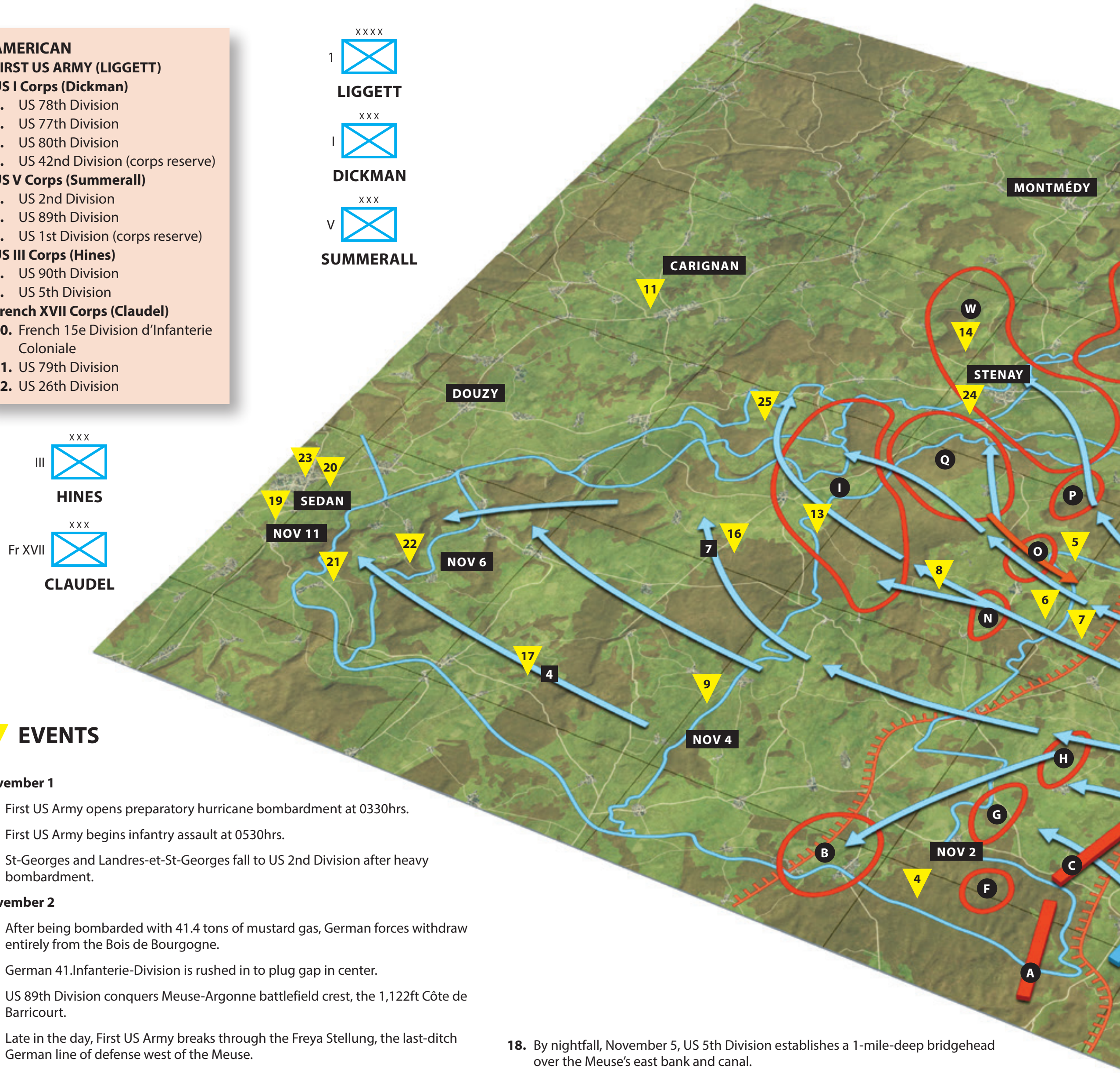
5. US 2nd Division
6. US 89th Division
7. US 1st Division (corps reserve)

**US III Corps (Hines)**

8. US 90th Division
9. US 5th Division

**French XVII Corps (Claudel)**

10. French 15e Division d'Infanterie Coloniale
11. US 79th Division
12. US 26th Division



## EVENTS

**November 1**

1. First US Army opens preparatory hurricane bombardment at 0330hrs.
2. First US Army begins infantry assault at 0530hrs.
3. St-Georges and Landres-et-St-Georges fall to US 2nd Division after heavy bombardment.

**November 2**

4. After being bombarded with 41.4 tons of mustard gas, German forces withdraw entirely from the Bois de Bourgogne.
5. German 41.Infanterie-Division is rushed in to plug gap in center.
6. US 89th Division conquers Meuse-Argonne battlefield crest, the 1,122ft Côte de Barricourt.
7. Late in the day, First US Army breaks through the Freya Stellung, the last-ditch German line of defense west of the Meuse.

**November 3**

8. US 2nd Division advances 4 miles overnight using nighttime infiltration tactics.
9. By morning, von Kleist's Argonnen Gruppe and von Oven's Maasgruppe West have been temporarily transferred to von Einem's 3.Armee, which begins withdrawing north toward a Meuse crossing northwest of Sedan.
10. At 0100hrs, US 5th Division begins the Americans' first attempts to cross the Meuse.
11. US heavy guns begin firing on Sedan rail line southeast of Sedan.
12. US 79th Division attacks German lines at the Côtes de Meuse.
13. US 2nd Division advances another 2½ miles overnight.

**November 4**

14. Marwitz's German 5.Armee begins crossing the Meuse north of Stenay.
15. The Austrian KuK XVIII.Korpskommando and all three Austrian divisions begin unilateral withdrawal back to Austria-Hungary.

**November 5**

16. US 1st Division relieves US 80th Division in US V Corps line at 0630hrs.
17. US 42nd Division relieves US 78th Division in US I Corps line at 1200hrs.
18. By nightfall, November 5, US 5th Division establishes a 1-mile-deep bridgehead over the Meuse's east bank and canal.

**November 6**

19. Von Einem's 3.Armee begins withdrawing across the Meuse late on November 6.

**November 7**

20. US 42nd and 1st divisions attack 14.Reserve-Division in Sedan bridgehead.
21. Sedan sector turned over to French 4e Armée.

**November 8**

22. US I Corps passes into First US Army reserve.

**November 9**

23. French 40e Division and US 42nd Division's attached Company D, 166th Infantry liberates Sedan.
24. US III Corps' 90th Division begins crossing the Meuse.

**November 10**

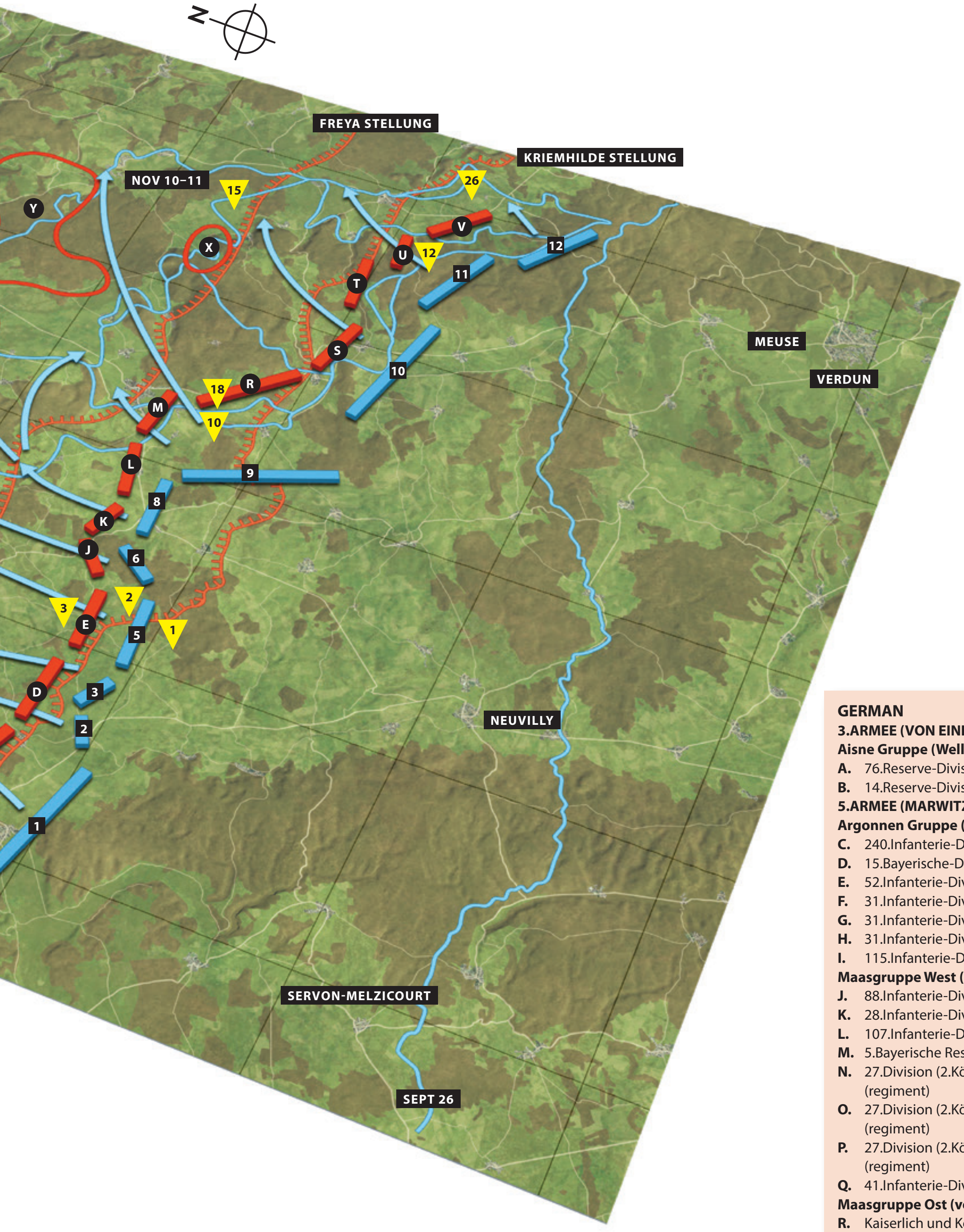
25. US V Corps' 2nd and 89th divisions begin crossing the Meuse.

**November 11**

26. Private Henry Gunther incident (US 313th Infantry, 79th Division) at Chaumont-devant-Damvillers, 1059hrs. The Compiègne Armistice ends World War I at 1100hrs.

# BREAKOUT AND PURSUIT, NOVEMBER 1–11, 1918

The Americans shatter the Hindenburg Line and race toward Sedan.


N
FREYA STELLUNG
KRIEMHILDE STELLUNG
NOV 10–11
MEUSE
VERDUN
NEUVILLY
SERVON-MELZICOURT
SEPT 26
Y
X
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U
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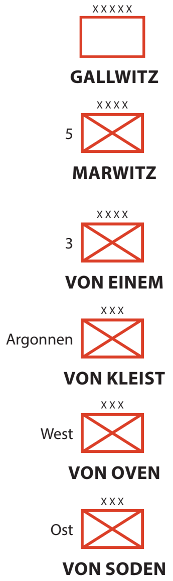
XXXXX
GALLWITZ
XXXX
5
MARWITZ
XXXX
3
VON EINEM
XXX
Argonnen
VON KLEIST
XXX
West
VON OVEN
XXX
Ost
VON SODEN

**GERMAN**

**3.ARMEE (VON EINEM)**

**Aisne Gruppe (Wellman)**

- **A.** 76.Reserve-Division
- **B.** 14.Reserve-Division

**5.ARMEE (MARWITZ)**

**Argonnen Gruppe (von Kleist)**

- **C.** 240.Infanterie-Division
- **D.** 15.Bayerische-Division
- **E.** 52.Infanterie-Division
- **F.** 31.Infanterie-Division (regiment)
- **G.** 31.Infanterie-Division (regiment)
- **H.** 31.Infanterie-Division (regiment)
- **I.** 115.Infanterie-Division

**Maasgruppe West (von Oven)**

- **J.** 88.Infanterie-Division
- **K.** 28.Infanterie-Division
- **L.** 107.Infanterie-Division
- **M.** 5.Bayerische Reserve-Division
- **N.** 27.Division (2.Königlich Württembergische) (regiment)
- **O.** 27.Division (2.Königlich Württembergische) (regiment)
- **P.** 27.Division (2.Königlich Württembergische) (regiment)
- **Q.** 41.Infanterie-Division

**Maasgruppe Ost (von Soden)**

- **R.** Kaiserlich und Königlich 1.Infanterie-Division
- **S.** 228.Infanterie-Division
- **T.** 192.Infanterie-Division
- **U.** 1.Landwehr-Division
- **V.** 15.Infanterie-Division
- **W.** 13.Infanterie-Division
- **X.** 117.Infanterie-Division (regiment)
- **Y.** 117.Infanterie-Division (less one regiment)

Note: gridlines are shown at intervals of 10km (6.2 miles)

against Fuchs' Armee Abteilung C. Bullard's left-hand French XVII Corps, with its sole US 33rd Division, occupied Bois de Marville and Bois les Hautes-Épines, entered Marcheville-en-Woëvre, and penetrated German positions in the Bois d'Harville. In the center, Major-General Charles Muir's US IV Corps pushed forward to a line extending from the Bois de Haravillers to the Ferme des Hauts-Journaux. On the right, Menoher's US VI Corps attacked east of the Moselle through German positions and occupied Bois de Fréhaut, Bois de la Voivrotte, and Bois de Cheminot. By late morning, November 11, Second US Army had liberated 25 square miles of French territory. Bullard's command had suffered 6,212 casualties since October 12.

## ENDGAME ON THE WESTERN FRONT

Allied commanders-in-chief had met at Senlis on October 25 to discuss possible armistice terms. The BEF's Haig supported lenient terms against Germany if it meant ending the war, but Foch and Pétain preferred considerably harsher demands. Pershing disdained an armistice entirely; he adamantly demanded Germany be invaded and forced to sign a draconian unconditional surrender on its own soil, forever destroying Prussian militarism. Foch appreciated Pershing's aggressiveness, noting, "When one hunts a wild beast and finally comes upon him at bay, one then faces greater danger, but it is not the time to stop, it is time to redouble one's blows, without paying any attention to those he, himself, receives."

Weeks earlier, on September 29, a panicking Ludendorff had suddenly claimed the Western Front could collapse in "two hours" and demanded the German government immediately seek an armistice. Days later, after new chancellor Max von Baden had reluctantly forwarded peace feelers to the United States, Ludendorff abruptly changed his mind and insisted Germany fight to the end. Increasingly frustrated, von Baden forced a showdown that resulted in the Kaiser accepting Ludendorff's resignation on October 26. Ludendorff fled to Sweden and was replaced by Generalleutnant Wilhelm Groener.

By early November 1918, widespread German famine, material deprivation, and familial sacrifice had suddenly combined with battlefield defeat so sweeping even Reich propaganda was unable to conceal the disaster. German home-front morale abruptly collapsed. On November 3 and 4, revolting German naval sailors seized Kiel. Within days, the left-wing revolution had spread out of control to major cities throughout Germany. By November 10, Kaiser Wilhelm II had abdicated and fled to the Netherlands in exile.

German peace representatives had secretly arrived at Compiègne, France on November 8. Foch's terms were harsh. All German-occupied France, Belgium, Luxembourg, and Alsace-Lorraine were to be immediately evacuated, western Germany evacuated to the Rhine, and the Allies given 19-mile radius bridgeheads across the Rhine into central Germany within 31 days. Some 5,000 artillery pieces, 25,000 machine guns, 3,000 *Minenwerfer*, 1,700 aircraft, 5,000 locomotives, 150,000 railway cars, and 5,000 trucks were to be immediately surrendered. Africa would be evacuated, the treaties of Brest-Litovsk and Bucharest renounced, all

French and British officials pose outside the famous Compiègne Wagon shortly after the Armistice was signed, November 11, 1918. No Americans or British Army officers were present. Built in Saint-Denis as dining car No. 2419D, by August 1918, Foch had requisitioned the wagon to be his mobile headquarters. (Public domain)

COMPAGNIE
2419 D

Allied POWs and interned civilians repatriated, and Germany's Kaiserliche Marine entirely disarmed and surrendered within 14 days—battleships, U-boats, and all. The Allies gave up nothing, keeping both German POWs and the in situ Allied naval blockade.

Foch then informed the shocked German delegation they had 72 hours to either sign or continue the war. With Germany verging on full Marxist revolution, the German representatives had been instructed to sign under almost any circumstances. At 0500hrs, November 11, they did. The actual ceasefire was set for 1100hrs that morning. Despite later Nazi myth-making, the Compiègne Armistice had been dictated to a shattered Deutsches Heer. Liggett, hardly given to bluster, believed another day or two would have "reduced it to a mob." Gallwitz despaired: "I never expected conditions so humiliating! This was not armistice but rather an unconditional surrender!"

"Calamity Jane" of the US 11th Field Artillery at Bois de la Haie at the Meuse-Argonne. According to the original caption, "Calamity Jane" is firing the last shot of World War I. No doubt thousands of gun crews claimed to have fired the war's final shot the morning of November 11, 1918. (Bettmann via Getty Images)

Of all the belligerents, the United States alone was still feeding large amounts of fresh new formations into the line. This inadvertently produced a disturbing American phenomenon the morning of November 11. Many career US Army officers, having just arrived at the front days or even hours earlier, desperately pushed their units into combat despite knowing the war would end at 1100hrs.

Late that morning, at Chaumont-devant-Damvillers, a patrolling squad from the US 79th Division's 313th Infantry spied a German machine-gun nest and took cover; both Americans and Germans were prepared to wait out the war's final minutes. Among the US patrol was Henry Gunther, a bookish 23-year-old German-American conscript from Baltimore. Back in July, Sergeant Gunther had written a buddy back home, describing the awful front conditions and urging his friend to avoid the draft. But his letter had been intercepted by draconian US censors. Shamed and busted to private, Gunther had since labored under an unfair reputation for cowardice, and he had spiraled into a deep depression. As his companions later described, "Gunther brooded a great deal over his recent reduction in rank, and became obsessed with a determination to make good before his officers and fellow soldiers."

Suddenly, with two minutes remaining before the Armistice, Gunther fixed bayonet, leapt from the American lines, and charged the German machine-gun nest. The horrified German gunners furiously waved the charging Gunther back, but inevitably they had no choice but to shoot Gunther dead. The time was 1059hrs. Private Henry Gunther is widely credited as the last combat death of World War I from any nation.

The shellfire tapered off reluctantly: "There was no let-up in the fire of the [American 14in.] naval batteries until the Armistice went into effect," boasted USN Lieutenant-Commander Joel Bunkley. "The last shot was fired from No. 4 gun at 10:57:30, which permitted it to land a few seconds before eleven o'clock." It was, presumably, the last of 4.2 million artillery shells First US Army had expended since September 26.

By November 11, 1918, some 1.2 million Americans and 135,000 French had engaged 450,000 Germans and Austrians at the Meuse-Argonne. Between September 20 and November 11, First US Army had evacuated 173,000 men to the rear and received 100,000 replacements. A total of 22

SIGNAL CORPS USA 38476

Proud American doughboys display their captured Imperial German battle flag, November 20, 1918. The AEF's involvement in World War I was widely celebrated into the 1930s. But once outside the borders of a grateful France, a combination of American disillusionment, World War II, and overwhelmingly British scholarship would eventually cause the AEF's achievements to largely be forgotten. (US Army Signal Corps, public domain)

US divisions and four French divisions had engaged parts of 47 different German divisions, representing a quarter of total German strength in the West. The Americans had drawn 20 German divisions away from the French front and one division away from the British front. A revisionist Pershing later claimed First US Army's mission had always been to "draw the best German divisions to our own front and consume them."

First US Army had inflicted 100,000 casualties on German defenders, including 28,000 killed, and had captured 26,000 prisoners, 874 guns, and over 3,000 machine guns. In the air, the First Army Air Service claimed a dubious 417 enemy planes and 53 enemy balloons shot down during the Meuse-Argonne campaign, while losing 192 planes and 22 balloons in action. Some 150 French towns and villages had been liberated and nearly 600 square miles of territory recovered, with a maximum penetration of 34 miles since September 26. Strategically, the southern Hindenburg Line had been broken. More importantly, the Sedan–Mézières rail line had been severed, forcing the total evacuation of German forces on the Western Front. Ludendorff called Pershing's Meuse-Argonne offensive "the decisive attack against the rear communications of the German army in northern France," while Gallwitz marveled at the "vastness and vigor of America's military expansion," ultimately claiming that the "astonishing display of American strength … definitely decided the war against us."

While barely remembered today, the Meuse-Argonne ranks as the largest and deadliest battle in American history. First US Army had suffered 122,000 casualties (115,000 Americans and 7,000 French), including 26,277 Americans killed. Surviving doughboys overwhelmingly blamed their amateurish leadership for such high losses. Upon interviewing aging AEF veterans in the 1970s, American historian Henry Berry asked a "very dignified gentleman" his "honest opinion" of the Meuse-Argonne. "Well, I think it was a f***ed-up mess," came the reply. "That," Berry admitted, "was the general opinion of all the men I saw." But mere weeks after war's end, Generalfeldmarschall Paul von Hindenburg—having slept in clean sheets at OHL headquarters while Reich map lines collapsed around him—held a different perspective:

> The British blockade and the American infantry in the Argonne won the war. I say this as a soldier, and soldiers will understand me best … The Argonne Battle was slow and difficult. But it was strategic … From a military point of view the Argonne Battle as conceived and carried out by the American command was the climax of the war and its deciding factor. The American attack continued from day to day with increasing power, but when two opposing divisions had broken each other, yours were replaced with ten thousand eager men, ours with decimated, ill-equipped, ill-fed men suffering from contact with a gloomy and despairing civilian population. I do not mean to discredit your fighting power. I repeat: without the American blow in the Argonne we could have made a satisfactory peace at the end of a long stalemate, or at least held our last positions on our own frontier indefinitely—undefeated. The American attack won the war.

# AFTERMATH

## THE AMERICAN OCCUPATION OF GERMANY, 1919–22

On November 15, 1918, the American Army of Occupation, Third US Army, was established at Ligny-en-Barrois under Major-General Joseph T. Dickman. Ultimately comprising 250,000 American troops in eight divisions, Third US Army would occupy 2,500 square miles of western Germany encompassing a population of 1 million, including a 19-mile bridgehead over the Rhine. The first US troops arrived in Coblenz on December 8, 1918.

Third US Army reached its full strength in early 1919, but began shipping divisions home that April. The following month, Lieutenant-General Hunter Liggett replaced Dickman as Third US Army commander. With the Treaty of Versailles signed on June 28, 1919, Third US Army headquarters was demobilized on July 2, 1919 and replaced by American Forces in Germany, under Major-General Henry T. Allen. Total occupying US troops fell to 15,000 by 1920 and then to 6,000 by 1921. On January 7, 1923, the US Senate voted to end the American occupation. The last American troops departed the occupied zone on January 24, 1923.

## LEGACY

The Meuse-Argonne was the United States' supreme engagement of World War I, representing roughly half the AEF's total battlefield contribution by manpower, combat, casualties, and materiel. In 1921, a German staff officer quite reasonably recalled the Meuse-Argonne as "a disproportioned struggle, which turned more and more to the disadvantage of the defender."

By November 1918, the AEF posted 2.1 million troops in France, surpassing the British Army as the Allies' second-largest national army on the Western Front. AEF combat engagement peaked in early October, when 30 of 43 divisions were in action. The AEF then held 101 miles of front, or 23 percent. By November, following a straightening of the line, the Americans occupied 83 miles, or 21 percent, of the Western Front, overtaking the British Army's 18 percent. Total wartime American fatalities were 116,516—less than half to combat, and ranking nearly last among major belligerents.

For this and other reasons, the modern Anglosphere has been reluctant to accord the AEF proper due for helping win the Great War. In morbid terms, the Americans came too late and not enough died. Yet if the war had continued into 1919 as expected, Foch's Allied invasion of Germany would have been spearheaded by a gargantuan and battle-tested AEF of 3.4 million confident and well-equipped American troops. As Ludendorff had foreseen, once Germany's 1918 Spring Offensives failed, the United States' latent demographic and economic supremacy fated it to be World War I's nation of strategic decision. If by November 1918 American military power had not yet proved the war's decisive tipping point, the Compiègne Armistice had merely delayed the inevitable.

# THE BATTLEFIELD TODAY

No tour of the Meuse-Argonne battlefield is complete without the indispensable *American Armies and Battlefields in Europe: A History, Guide, and Reference Book*, published by the American Battle Monuments Commission in 1938. Aimed at the self-guided American tourist and focusing on AEF battlefields in France, the book's 547 pages boast extensive text, hundreds of photographs, and 93 maps, many in color and folding out to impressive size and detail.

Still heavily cratered today, the shattered Vauquois butte's four-year hell ended in the Meuse-Argonne's first few hours. Between 1914 and 1918, Vauquois claimed over 14,000 lives, overwhelmingly French and German. As a major French battlefield, Vauquois and its miles of preserved trenches and tunnels are protected by the French government as a national monument. Moving north from Vauquois, one encounters several major American memorials erected by individual US states. At Cheppy is the Missouri First World War Monument, erected in 1922. One mile away at Varennes (and mere yards from Louis XVI's June 22, 1791 arrest) is the Pennsylvania Memorial, dedicated in 1927.

Alvin York's Enfield had barely cooled before envious cynics insisted York's narrative was self-serving exaggeration or even sheer fantasy. Such revisionism ignored the sworn affidavits of York's squadmates, as well as US officers' investigation of the ground the following day. The incident's exact location was lost after 1919, helping sustain the controversy. In October 2006, after years of private research, a team led by US Army officer Douglas Mastriano recovered 46 spent .30-06 and 23 spent .45 ACP rounds from the eastern Argonne. Ballistic analysis later linked them to York's weapons. Mastriano also recovered large amounts of discarded German infantry equipment in concentrations suggesting surrender. Mastriano's efforts overwhelmingly confirmed York's official narrative and pinpointed the exact location of York's episode. With the endorsement of the French government, two monuments and a 2-mile Sergeant York Trail were constructed to facilitate walking tours.

In 1923, the American Battle Monuments Commission was established as an independent agency of the US federal government. The ABMC was tasked with commemorating, establishing, and operating US war memorials around the world. Located 1 mile northeast of Romagne, the ABMC's 130.5-acre Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery is the largest American military cemetery in Europe. Most of the 14,246 Americans interred here died in the Meuse-Argonne offensive. Atop Montfaucon stands the 200ft-tall Meuse-Argonne American Memorial. Unveiled on August 1, 1937, it remains the largest American war memorial in Europe.

In 1924, Pershing himself delivered perhaps the Meuse-Argonne's most appropriate memorial: "Let's not talk high-sounding phrases. Let's not use old shop-worn words like 'glory' and 'peace' without thinking exactly what they mean. There's no 'glory' in killing. There's no 'glory' in maiming men. There are the glorious dead, but they would be more glorious living."

# GLOSSARY AND ABBREVIATIONS

## GLOSSARY

### French

| | |
|---|---|
| artillerie d'assault | medium tank(s) |
| Armée Française | French Army |
| bataillon | infantry battalion, light tank battalion |
| bois | woods |
| chef de bataillon | major (infantry or light tanks) |
| côtes | heights, bluffs |
| division de cavalerie à pied | dismounted cavalry division |
| dragons | dragoons |
| ferme | farm |
| forêt | forest |
| général de division | lieutenant-general |
| généralissime | supreme commander |
| groupe | artillery battery, medium tank company |
| groupe d'armées | army group |
| groupement | artillery battalion, medium tank battalion |

### German

| | |
|---|---|
| Abteilung | detachment |
| Bayerische(s) | Bavarian |
| Bombenstaffel(n) | bombing squadron |
| Deutsches Heer | German Army |
| Erster Generalquartiermeister | deputy chief of staff |
| Feldbahn | field railroad |
| Feldhaubitze | field howitzer |
| Feldkanone | field gun |
| Feldmarschalleutnant | Lieutenant field marshal (Austrian lieutenant-general) |
| Fliegerabteilung(en) | Reconnaissance/ liaison flight detachment(s) |
| Fuss | foot |
| Garde | guards |
| Gegenstösse | counterattacks |
| Generalleutnant | lieutenant-general |
| Generalkommando | general headquarters |
| Generalleutnant | lieutenant-general |
| Generaloberst | colonel-general (four-star general) |
| General der … | general of the … (major-general) |
| Gruppe | group, i.e. corps-sized grouping |
| Hauptmann | captain (army) |
| Heeresgruppe(n) | army group(s) |
| Jagdgeschwader | fighter wing |
| Jagdstaffeln, Jasta | fighter squadron |
| Jäger | light infantry |
| Kaiserliche | imperial |
| Kaiserlich und Königlich, KuK | Imperial and Royal, i.e. Austro-Hungarian |
| Kavallerie | cavalry |
| Kessel | encirclement |
| Königlich | royal |
| Leiche | light |
| Leutnant | 2nd lieutenant |
| Maasgruppe | Meuse Group (corps-equivalent) |
| Pferd | horse |
| Oberleutnant | 1st lieutenant |
| Oberste Heeresleitung | Supreme Army Command |
| Sächsisch(e) | Saxon |
| Schlachtstaffel | specialized fighter-bomber squadron |
| Schwere | heavy |
| Stellung | position, location, line |
| Stosstruppen | stormtroops |
| Württembergische(s) | Württemberg (adjective) |

## ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| ABMC | American Battle Monuments Commission |
| AEF | American Expeditionary Force |
| ASL | above sea level |
| BAR | Browning Automatic Rifle |
| BCL | Brigade de Cavalerie Légère |
| BEF | British Expeditionary Force |
| DCP | Division de Cavalerie à Pied |
| GAC | Groupe d'Armées du Centre |
| GAE | Groupe d'Armées de l'Est |
| GAF | Groupe d'Armées des Flandres |
| GAR | Groupe d'Armées de Réserve |
| GPF | Grande Puissance Filloux |
| KuK | Kaiserlich und Königlich |
| OHL | Oberste Heeresleitung |
| SOS | Services of Supply |
| USN | US Navy |

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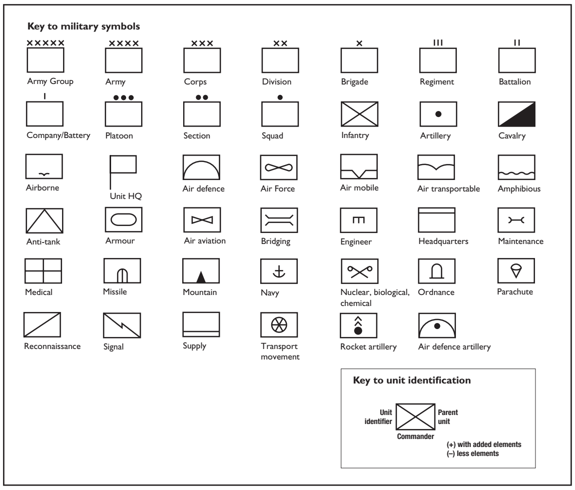
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Army Group
Army
Corps
Division
Brigade
Regiment
Battalion
Company/Battery
Platoon
Section
Squad
Infantry
Artillery
Cavalry
Airborne
Unit HQ
Air defence
Air Force
Air mobile
Air transportable
Amphibious
Anti-tank
Armour
Air aviation
Bridging
Engineer
Headquarters
Maintenance
Medical
Missile
Mountain
Navy
Nuclear, biological, chemical
Ordnance
Parachute
Reconnaissance
Signal
Supply
Transport movement
Rocket artillery
Air defence artillery
Key to unit identification
Unit identifier
Parent unit
Commander
(+) with added elements
(–) less elements

## Artist's note

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American soldiers pause for rest in the Meuse-Argonne. (Mondadori Portfolio by Getty Images)